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THE CORNHILL



No. 976

AUTUMN, 1948

MAGAZINE

EDITED BY PETER QUENNEL

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Friends have spoken of the deep hush, half reverent and half apprehensive, that used to spread through the departments of a great New York weekly newspaper when word went round that Dr. Kinsey and his team of investigators were somewhere in the building. Today it was Mr. Heinz's turn : and employees would walk on tiptoe past the closed and guarded door, behind which some public-spirited executive was exploring his most private recollections in the cause of social science : it was universally acknowledged that he was doing the brave and right thing . . . Certainly he was doing the right thing from Dr. Kinsey's point of view : for, when the massive *Report* at length appeared, that huge volume proved to be a best-seller which broke every previous record. Only here and there did one meet a sceptical reader, who murmured that, although Dr. Kinsey and his associates had spread their net very widely, and had picked over the muddy and slightly malodorous contents of their trawl with quite amazing thoroughness, some highly important factors of the sexual situation seemed somehow to have escaped them : that many of their vast statistical tables were figures—figures—figures—and that, as an analysis of the conduct of thinking, feeling human organisms, they added up to zero. In the present number of the CORNHILL, Geoffrey Gorer, already the author of an extremely interesting book on modern American psychology, supplies a corrective that is needed. It is the type of article for which we wish to find more and more room in the pages of this magazine. As a quarterly publication, we cannot print book-reviews with any hope of usefulness ; but prospective contributors will kindly note that we welcome essays dealing with issues of a topical and controversial kind raised by current literature.

[The Editor asks that all contributions should be addressed to him at 50 Albemarle Street, London, W.1, and accompanied by a stamped envelope.]

Subscriptions for the CORNHILL are available from any bookseller or from 50 Albemarle Street, London, W.1. A subscription for 4 issues costs 10s. 8d. and for 8 issues 21s. 4d., including postage. A few copies of the Spring and Summer issues are available for those who wish to read Osbert Lancaster's *THE SARACEN'S HEAD*. During the present paper restriction the CORNHILL can only appear quarterly.]

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The Drunkard

BY FRANK O'CONNOR

ALL the trouble really began when Mr. Dooley on the Terrace died. Mr. Dooley was a commercial traveller with two sons in the Dominicans, so he was really a cut above us, but he was a man who was very fond of the sound of his own voice, and all he had to do of an evening was to cross the road and stand at the garden-gate laying down the law to my father. After these sessions my father always stumped in with an excited air to my mother and said, 'Do you know what Mr. Dooley is after telling me?'

My father was really quite upset about his death, because it was unexpected and Mr. Dooley was about the one age with himself—a thing which always induces a certain solemnity in a man of mature age—and even more, because now he would have no one to tell him anything. You could count on your fingers the number of men on our road who read the papers like Mr. Dooley or my da, and among them there wasn't one who would be seen night after night, standing at our gate.

'Half-past two to the Curragh,' said my father thoughtfully, putting down the paper with the death notice on it.

'But surely you're not thinking of going to the funeral?' asked my mother in alarm.

'Ah, now,' said my father with a toss of his head, 'we were always very friendly.'

'I think,' my mother said with suppressed emotion, 'that it will be as much as anyone will expect if you go to the chapel with him. Sure, we hardly know the people.'

'Now,' said my father with great dignity, 'we'd be glad if it was our own turn—God between us and all harm!'

My father was always liable to lose a half-day's pay for the sake of a funeral. It wasn't so much that he liked funerals as that he was a conscientious man who did as he would be done by, and if anything could have consoled him for the thought of his own death it would have been the prospect of a public tribute of respect. And, to give the mother her due, it wasn't the half-day's pay she begrudged, though we could ill afford it.

Drink, you see, was my father's great weakness. He could keep off it for months, even for years, at an end, and while he did he was as good as gold. He was a humorous, good-natured, industrious man, and over weeks a cross word would never pass his lips; he was first up in the morning and brought the mother a cup of tea in bed, stayed at home in the evenings and read the paper, saved money and bought himself a new suit of blue serge and a new bowler-hat. He merely laughed at the folly of men who spent their hard-earned money on liquor, and sometimes, to pass an idle hour, he would take pencil and paper and calculate precisely how much he saved each week through being a teetotaler.

It was only later I realised that this in itself was a bad sign; a sign that he was becoming stuffed up with spiritual pride and imagining himself different from other men. His real danger-point was when he took a day off to celebrate, and indulged in one drink—just one drink of something harmless like lager—to show that he wasn't stuck-up and could take a drop with the next without making a fool of himself. That was the end of my da. By the time he had taken the first one he realised already that he had made a fool of himself; took a second to forget it, and a third to forget that he couldn't forget it; and then came home reeling drunk. Next day he stayed away from work with a sick head, and within a fortnight was poor and savage and despairing again. Once he began he drank his way steadily through everything till he reached the kitchen clock. Mother and I knew all the phases and always dreaded the hour. Funerals were a danger.

'I have to go to Dunphy's to do a half-day's work,' mother said in distress. 'Who's going to look after Paddy?'

'I'll look after Paddy,' said my father by way of a concession. 'The walk will do him good.'

My mother had no further objection to raise, though we all knew that I didn't need anyone to look after me, that the walk would do me no good, and that I was being attached to the party merely to act as a brake on my da. As a brake I had never achieved anything, but my mother had a pathetic faith in the effect of my charm and innocence.

Next day when I came in early from school my father had the kettle boiled and made tea for both of us. As my father's accomplishments didn't go beyond tea I refused a boiled egg. Afterwards we went down to the church, my father wearing his best blue serge and a bowler which he wore to one side of his close-cropped head with the least suggestion of rakishness. To his great joy he discovered Peter Crowley among the mourners. Peter was another

danger signal as I well knew from certain experiences after Mass on Sunday ; a mean man, as my mother said, who only went to funerals in the hope of free drinks ; but my father had a weakness for him as one of those foolish people whom in his spiritual pride he pitied and despised.

It was a very good funeral from my father's point of view. He had it all well studied before we set off after the hearse in the afternoon sunlight.

'Five carriages !' he said in a tone of astonishment. 'Five carriages and sixteen covered cars ! There's one Alderman, two Town Councillors, a Dean and 'tis unknown how many priests. My goodness, I didn't see a funeral as big as this from the road since Willie Mack, the publican—God rest him !—died.'

'Ah, he was a very respectable man,' said Peter Crowley.

'Don't I know that well ?' replied my father testily. 'Sure, the man was one of my best friends. I was talking to him only two nights before he died. But I never imagined he was as well-connected as that.'

My father was stepping out like a boy, interested in everything, the other mourners and the fine houses of the respectable locality through which we passed before we reached the Blarney Road. I knew the danger signals were present in full strength : a sunny day, a fine funeral and distinguished company were bringing out all the natural vanity and flightiness of his character. It was with something like genuine pleasure that he stood by poor Mr. Dooley's grave in the windy graveyard on top of the hill ; with the sense of a duty fulfilled and a feeling of enormous relief that however much he might miss poor Mr. Dooley these long summer evenings, it was he and not Mr. Dooley would do the missing. That was something for a man to celebrate.

'We'll be making tracks before they break up,' he whispered conspiratorially to Crowley as the grave-diggers began to toss in the first shovels full of clay, and away with him, hopping like a goat from grave to grave to the gate. The drivers, who were probably experiencing the same sensations though without months of abstinence to put an edge on them, looked up hopefully.

'Are they nearly finished ?' bawled one.

'All over now but the last prayers,' trumpeted my father joyously.

They passed us in a lather of dust several hundred yards from the pub, and my father, whose feet had a tendency to give him trouble in hot weather, quickened his pace, looking nervously over his shoulder to see if there was any sign of the main body of mourners crossing the ridge of the hill.

When we reached the pub the carriages were drawn up outside, and two grave-looking men in mourning were cautiously carrying out glasses of porter and wine and delivering them to mysterious-looking female hands which reached out modestly from behind the drawn curtains of the mourning coaches. Inside there were only the drivers and a couple of old shawly women. I felt if I was going to act as a brake, now was the time.

'Daddy,' I said, pulling him by the coat, 'can't we go home now?'

'In one minute now,' he replied, beaming at me. 'You must be thirsty after the long walk. We'll just have one bottle of lemonade and go home.'

This was a bribe, and I knew it, but I was always a child of weak character. My father ordered two pints and a bottle of lemonade. I drank the lemonade at a gulp. That wasn't his way. He had long months of abstinence behind him. He took out his pipe, blew through it, filled it, and then lit it with loud pops, the eyes bulging from his head. Then he deliberately turned his back on his pint of porter, leaned his elbow on the counter almost in the attitude of a man ignoring it, delicately brushed the tobacco from his hands and began a long rigmarole about the funerals he had attended in his time. The carriages departed and other mourners drifted in till the pub was half full.

'Daddy,' I said, pulling at his coat again, 'can't we go home now?'

'Ah, your mother won't be home for a long time yet,' he said, glancing down at me affectionately. 'Run out in the road and play.'

I was always upset by the calm assumption of grown-ups that a child could play all by himself on a strange road. Boredom began to descend on me as it had so often done before. I knew my father was quite capable of staying there till nightfall while I snivelled with weariness and hunger. I knew I might have to bring him home, rolling drunk, down Blarney Lane with all the women at their doors saying 'Mick Delaney is on it again.' I knew my mother would be half-crazy with anxiety; that tomorrow my father wouldn't go to work and that before the end of the week she would be running to the pawnshop with the clock under her shawl. The lonesomeness of the kitchen without a clock always represented the last stage of misery to me.

I was still thirsty after the lemonade. I found that if I stood on tiptoe I could just reach my father's glass, and the fancy suddenly struck me to see what the porter tasted like. He had his back to it,

and he wouldn't notice. I took down the glass and sipped. It tasted very bad to me. I couldn't imagine what pleasure he got out of it, more particularly when there was lemonade to be had.

My father was settling down for a real nice chat. I heard him say that bands were a great addition to a funeral. He put his hands in the position of a man holding a rifle at the reverse and hummed a few bars of Chopin's Funeral March. I took a long drink and began to see that porter might have its points. I felt pleasantly elevated and philosophic. My father hummed a few bars of the Beethoven Funeral March. It was a nice pub and a nice funeral, and I felt sure poor Mr. Dooley in Heaven must have been very well pleased with it. I was sorry he hadn't had a band for I liked a bit of music myself.

But the really delightful thing about porter was that it enabled you to stand aside, or rather to float aloft like a cherub on a cloud, and watch yourself with your legs crossed, leaning against the counter, thinking deep grown-up thoughts. By the time I had finished the pint I found it hard to put back the glass; the counter seemed to have got higher. Melancholia was supervening again.

'Well,' said my father piously, reaching behind him for the glass and raising it, 'God rest the poor man's soul wherever he is.' He stopped; looked incredulously at the glass and then at the people nearest him. 'Hallo,' he said, as if he were still prepared to consider it as a joke, 'who was at my glass?'

'Erra, there was no one at your glass, my good man,' said one of the shawly women with an offended air. 'Is it robbers you think we are?'

'Someone drank that while my back was turned,' he snarled, deciding that this was something more than a joke.

'If they did, they were them that were nearer you than us,' said the old woman darkly, giving me a suspicious look, and at the same moment the truth dawned on my father. He bent down and shook me.

'What ails you, little boy?' he asked anxiously.

Peter Crowley looked at me too and began to grin.

'Could you beat that?' he asked in a husky voice.

I could, without difficulty. I started to get sick. My father jumped away from me in terror lest I might spoil his new suit and then opened the back-door for me.

'Run! run!' he said.

I saw the sunlit wall outside, with the ivy overhanging it, and made straight for it. The intention was good but the performance

was exaggerated because I lurched right into the wall, hurting it badly as it seemed to me, but I had other things to think of beside the wall. My father, still concerned for his suit, came behind me and held me up while I got sick.

'That's a good boy,' he said encouragingly. 'You'll be grand when you get that up.'

But I wasn't grand. Grand was the last thing I was. I gave one unmerciful wail out of me as he steered me back to the pub and put me sitting on the bench beside the shawlies. They drew themselves up with an offended air. They were still sore about the suggestion that they had drunk my father's pint.

'Isn't it the likes of them would be left in charge of poor unfortunate children?' said one. 'Tis in charge of the police the most of them should be.'

'Mick,' said the publican in alarm, coming out to spray more sawdust on the floor, 'that child isn't supposed to be in here at all. You'd better get him home quick in case a bobby comes.'

'God Almighty,' whimpered my father, raising his eyes to heaven and clapping his hands silently as he did when he was deeply upset, 'what'll his mother say? . . . This,' he snarled suddenly, 'is what comes of women going out to work instead of stopping at home and looking after their children. . . . Are the carriages gone, Bill?'

'Oh, the carriages are all gone,' said the publican.

'All right,' snapped my father, 'I'll take him home. . . . I'll never again bring you out,' he said to me. 'Here,' he added, handing me the coloured handkerchief from his breast pocket, 'put that over your eye and hide it.'

It was only when I put the handkerchief to my face and it stuck that I realised I was cut and set up another wail.

'Whisht, whisht, whisht!' my father said testily, steering me out the door. 'One'd think you were killed. That'll be nothing. We'll wash it when we get you home.'

'Steady now, old scout,' said Crowley, taking the other side of me. 'You'll be all right in a minute.'

I never met two men who knew less about the effects of porter. The fresh air and hot sun only made me groggier than ever, and I reeled between them till my father started to whimper again.

'Oho, God Almighty, and the whole road out! Oho, what misfortune was on me not to stop at my work! . . . Can't you walk straight?'

I couldn't, though I saw as plain as he did that, coaxed by the sunlight, every woman in Blarney Lane was either leaning over her

half door or sitting on her doorstep, and that they all stopped their gabbling when they saw the strange spectacle of two middle-aged sober men bringing home an intoxicated small boy with a cut over his eye. My father, torn between the shamefast desire to get me home as quick as he could and the neighbourly need for explaining that it wasn't his fault that I was in such a condition, stopped outside old Mrs. Roche's to tell his sad tale. I leaned against the wall of the house with my hands in my trousers pockets. There were a couple of old women outside a door at the opposite side of the road. I thought of poor Mr. Dooley laid in his cold grave in the Curragh who would never walk down the road again and began softly to sing a favourite song of my father's.

Though lost to Mononia and cold in the grave
He returns to Kincora no more.

'Wisha, the poor child,' said Mrs. Roche in great amusement. 'Haven't he a lovely voice, God bless him!'

'Whisht, now, whisht,' said my father, raising his finger to me. It surprised me that he didn't show more appreciation of his favourite song, considering the appropriateness of it. 'We're nearly home now. I'll carry you the rest of the way.'

But drunk and all as I was, I knew better than to be brought home in somebody's arms.

'Now,' I said severely, 'can't you leave me alone? I can walk all right. 'Tis only my head. All I want is a rest.'

'You can rest in bed at home,' he said, trying to pick me up.

'Ah, Jasus, what do I want to go home for?' I said crossly, pushing him off. 'Why the hell can't you let me alone?'

For some reason the old women at the other side of the road thought this was very funny. It annoyed me considerably, to think a fellow couldn't have a drop taken without the whole neighbourhood coming out to make game of him.

'Who are ye laughing at?' I shouted, clenching my fists. 'I'll soon make ye laugh at the other side of yeer faces if ye don't let me pass.'

They thought that was funnier still.

'Whisht, whisht, whisht, I tell you,' my father snapped, dropping all pretence of amusement and dragging me along by the hand. I was maddened by the shrieks of those women. I tried to dig in my heels but he was too strong for me and I could only see them at all by looking back over my shoulder.

'Leave me at them!' I shouted. 'Leave me at them and I'll cure them. I'll make them stop inside and wash their dirty faces!'

'Twill be all over the road,' whimpered my father again. 'Oho, oho, never again, never again, not if I lived to be a thousand!'

When we got home Peter Crowley, who knew where he was wanted, cleared off and my father undressed me and put me to bed. I couldn't sleep because of the whirling in my head. It was very unpleasant and I got sick again. My father came in with a wet cloth and mopped it up. I lay there in a fever, listening to him chopping sticks to start a fire. After that he laid the table. Suddenly the front door banged open and my mother stormed in, not her usual timid self but a wild, raging woman.

'Mick Delaney,' she cried hysterically, 'what did you do to my son?'

'Whisht, whisht, whisht,' he began to hiss, dancing from one foot to the other in terror lest the neighbours might hear. 'There's nothing the matter with him, only a little scrape over his eye.'

'A scrape over his eye!' she repeated. 'What do you mean, filling the unfortunate child with drink to make sport for yourself and that other dirty, rotten, filthy brute?'

'But I tell you, woman,' he shouted indignantly, 'I gave him no drink. He took it while my back was turned. What the hell do you think I am?'

'God forgive you,' she said bitterly. 'By this time the whole road knows what you are. God forgive you, wasting our hard-earned couple of ha'pence in public-houses, training your child up to be a drunken corner-boy like yourself!'

Then she swept into the bedroom and threw herself on her knees by the bed. She moaned when she saw the state of my eye. My father appeared in the bedroom door with his cap down over his eyes and a look of the most intense self-pity on his face.

'That's a nice bloody way to talk to me after all I went through,' he whined. 'That's a nice accusation to make, that I was drinking. How the hell could I be drinking when he drank the whole lot on me? I'm the one that ought to be pitied with my day ruined on me and after being made a laughing-stock for the whole road.'

But next morning, when he got up and went out quietly with his work-basket, my mother threw herself on me and kissed me. I was having a holiday from school till my eye got better.

'My brave little man!' she said with her eyes shining. 'Twas God did it you were there. You were his guardian angel.'

Justification by Numbers

A Commentary on the Kinsey Report

BY GEOFFREY GORER

FOR the social scientist, a best-seller is always an interesting and provocative phenomenon: what is it, he asks himself, that has made this book or play so much more acceptable to the reading public in this society at this period than the other books or plays produced at the same time? If this question can be satisfactorily answered, it invariably gives insight into the hidden wishes and fantasies of the book-reading public, and so throws light on the psychological dynamics of the society which has accepted the best-seller. Even though the conscious promotion of best-sellers has been very highly developed in recent years in the United States (witness the case of Nancy Brough), a best-seller cannot be established unless there is some congruence between its underlying material and the underlying wishes and fantasies of the purchasing public.

This year has witnessed an unparalleled phenomenon in publishing history: a dull and turgid scientific book, full of figures and tables, and published at a relatively very high price, has been selling at a rate paralleling such simple fantasies as *Gone With The Wind* or *Forever Amber*; the miscalled *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, by Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin is firmly established in the best-seller lists. It has been the subject of numerous articles and innumerable conversations; to parallel the immediate impact of a scientific book, one would probably have to go back to 1859, and the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*; and even then the sales were not comparable. Of course the social penetration of this book, and indeed of any book, should not be exaggerated; even if it sells a million copies, and each copy is looked at by five people—a generous estimate—it will only have reached three per cent of the American population; but even this is remarkable diffusion, and calls for comment and an attempt at explanation.

The pre-publication publicity campaign, with vetted articles strategically placed, was one of the most ingenious and carefully executed in recent publishing history; and undoubtedly a certain

number of purchasers bought the book in the hope of pornographic titillation. But if this had been its main drawing power, its sales would have quickly dropped, for few texts dealing with such a subject could be less stimulating; nor, in such a case, would it have received the long and solemn digests, in lieu of reviews or criticisms, which appeared in most of the public press.

I do not intend here to criticise the book from a scientific point of view. Competent specialists have pointed out, or will point out, the unsatisfactory nature of the sample on which Dr. Kinsey bases his generalisations; the dubious practice of treating memories of sexual behaviour many years ago as absolutely veridic, when no law-court will accept unsupported testimony of any event in the distant past; the ignoring of the accumulated psychiatric knowledge of the last fifty years on sexual behaviour and the (surely wilful) distortion of the theories and viewpoints of psychiatry. If this book had only been bought by specialists competent to criticise it, its impact as a social phenomenon would have been minute; but the vast mass of the readers, like the reviewers, accept the material uncritically, so that it is true for them. On this basis, what can one deduce about the attitudes and expectations of college-educated urban Americans (far and away the largest component in Dr. Kinsey's sample and almost certainly also in his customers) from the contents of the book, its reception in the popular press, and its echoes in conversation?

The chief novelty in the material, and the aspect which has been most consistently stressed, is the demonstration that certain types of sexual behaviour are more widely practised than had hitherto been supposed. That is all. No moderately sophisticated person can have been unaware that such practices existed; Dr. Kinsey has provided figures of distribution.

Why then has such a pothole been made about these figures of distribution? Why have reviewers stated, in various synonyms, that the book contains 'potential dynamite'? Why have there been numerous suggestions that, in the light of these 'disclosures,' the laws meant to regulate sexual behaviour, and the instructions and admonitions given to young people, will all have to be changed?

I suggest that this springs from what is in some ways the fundamental democratic fallacy, which may be called Justification by Numbers. If a few people do or think something, it may be wrong; but if a lot of people do or think it, then it is obviously right. This argument underlies a great deal of American advertising: to state that the brand you are marketing is the 'most popular brand' or 'sells more than double its nearest competitor'

is to suggest forcibly that it is therefore better. On the political level, the votes of the majority should undoubtedly be decisive on those issues on which they are called upon to vote (and these are remarkably few); but, to extend this principle to moral, psychological, or physiological activities is completely illogical.

An illustration may make this clearer. A colleague of Dr. Kinsey conducts a survey in Germany entitled *Eating Behaviour in the Human Male* and finds that, say, eighty per cent of the sample has a calory 'intake' of 1,500 units daily, that seventy-three per cent only have two dietetic 'intakes' daily, and so on and so forth; in the light of his 'disclosures' it will become clear that 1,500 calories daily divided into two meals is 'normal' eating behaviour, and that all our views on dietetics and nourishment have to be revised.

Most people would reject this as obvious nonsense, for we have scientifically determined standards of adequate nourishment, which have nothing to do with temporary and local practices; but the arguments are as valid in one case as the other. The scientific determination of adequate and satisfying sexual behaviour is by no means so well established or agreed upon, for, despite Dr. Kinsey, the implications of sex are much more complicated; but they will not be determined by a study of distribution. Dr. Kinsey's figures *can* be interpreted to mean that neurotic disturbances in sexual life in the contemporary United States are as widespread as malnutrition in contemporary Germany.

I do not mean to suggest by this that it would not be highly desirable to change or modify the laws of the various states which are meant to control sexual behaviour; but an unjust law does not change in injustice if it potentially affects thirty per cent of the population instead of three per cent. At most it makes the savage punishment of those who are convicted even more arbitrary than it had appeared before.

A second important aspect of this book is what might be called the 'atomisation' of sex. Until Dr. Kinsey came along, sex had generally been viewed as one of the most complex of all human activities, involving not merely the genital organs, but all the psychological and emotional components of the personality, both conscious and unconscious; but with Dr. Kinsey everything except overt genital behaviour has been omitted; sex has been reduced to statistics.

This atomisation is in congruence with one of the major trends in contemporary American culture. The triumphs of mass production have been produced by the calculated atomisation of the

manufacturing process and of the worker's movements. The atomisation of knowledge into a series of discrete and equal facts can be seen from the intelligence tests administered to pre-school moppets to the check-lists which in many colleges constitute the chief examination before proceeding to graduate studies, from the 'quiz' shows to the cross-word puzzle, from the instilling of new techniques into temporary officers to public opinion polls. Now sex has been added to the list.

By thus over-simplifying or atomising sex, it is possible to indulge in this domain too in the popular and wide-spread American habit of rating oneself. One of the chief recurring motives throughout American life from infancy to old age is the striving for relative success with one's equals and near-equals: precocity, marks or grades at school, athletic success, relative income, popularity—the list could be indefinitely prolonged. This 'self-rating' has become so emotionally important for so many Americans that the greater number of popular papers have scoring cards by which one can rate oneself for knowledge or for the possession of certain qualities ('20 to 16 excellent; 15 to 11 good; 10 to 6 average; under 6 poor'). Now Dr. Kinsey has supplied a great number of tables by which one can rate oneself, and, in an appendix, has thoughtfully broken them down by age, education, marital status, etc. With a little trouble one can find out how one stacks up in frequency of 'outlet,' variety of 'outlet' and even more intimate anatomical details with one's peers. 'Keeping up with the Joneses' acquires a new, and perhaps slightly ribald, significance.

As in all such 'self-rating' tables, admiration goes to the high scores. Behind the mask of dispassionateness one can easily discern Dr. Kinsey's astonished admiration for the people with the larger rates of 'outlet' and his contemptuous pity for those making poor scores. A little anthropological knowledge might have rectified this attitude. We have enough information from enough primitive societies to suggest that there is an (apparently) direct correlation between high rates of intercourse and lack of emotional interest in sex or belief in love; the Lepchas from the borders of Tibet, whom I studied, had rates of outlet in their early adult life which would make Dr. Kinsey's high scorers look like pikers. For the Lepchas, sex was a satisfaction no more important than food; they did not believe in love, made no allowances for it, and the exclusive possession of a spouse was legally impossible. As a matter of fact, Dr. Kinsey probably already had the evidence to confirm this; among his highest

scorers are his ubiquitous male prostitutes (p. 216)—a group which surely figures rather more importantly in Dr. Kinsey's sample than in the population at large. To equal the performances of such people is not perhaps wholly enviable.

It may be remarked that these 'self-rating' tables are liable to produce more disquiet than satisfaction in the people who consult them. Forty-nine per cent. of the population is always below the median. People so unsure of themselves as to need support from 'self-rating' are not too likely to get it. On the other hand, judging by previous experience, people who are disturbed about their 'deviance' will not get psychological comfort for more than a very few days from the tabular demonstration that their deviations are more widespread than they had suspected.

A probable by-product of these rating scales may well be further ammunition for the anti-intellectualism which is already widespread. In comic books and cartoons professors are always 'long-haired' and scientists are always 'mad'; now Dr. Kinsey brings evidence to show that, compared with the less educated, they are less 'manly,' make fewer girls and sleep less often with their wives than do the men who leave school as soon as it is legally possible. The implications are obvious.

To parody a phrase of Marxist dialectics, Dr. Kinsey's tables result in the devaluation of all values. An involuntary nocturnal emission, a little boy sliding down a rope, a murderous rape, or Romeo spending the night with Juliet, Damon with Pythias, Paolo with Francesca, are all equated as one 'outlet'; physiological itch, lust and love are reduced to their lowest common denominator, and it couldn't well be lower. Just as the dollar which may save oneself or one's family from starvation is no different to the dollar added to the billionaire's bank deposit, so in Dr. Kinsey's treatment are all sexual 'outlets' reduced to a dead level of physiological spasm. Like dollars, the more you have the better. Chastity, even though it be Abelard's, results in a low score; and who wants to rate low?

Inspection of the tables suggests a couple of further generalisations about the men who Dr. Kinsey interviewed. They do not easily tolerate physiological discomfort, and will get rid of it some way or other. Just as there is in the United States very low tolerance of even mild hunger or thirst or cold—as witnessed by the corner drugstore, the numerous drinking fountains, the central heating—so relatively mild gonadal pressure will be relieved somehow, almost as a health measure.

Secondly, despite the devaluation of all values, people are

seeking for a greater level of satisfaction in sex than can generally be achieved. This I think is the explanation for much of the premarital and occasional homosexual behaviour which Dr. Kinsey demonstrates. Some of these excursions may be due to the search for a 'good time' under the influence of alcohol, some to adolescent experimentation; but much would seem to be due to the seeking for an unattainable ideal.

I should be unhappy if it were deduced from this article that I am opposed to the scientific investigation of sexual behaviour; on the contrary, I think it is one of the most important gaps in our knowledge of contemporary society which, when filled, may do much to remedy the disquietudes and restlessness of this Age of Anxiety. But it needs a more integrated approach than that of an entomologist; an act which can consummate love and produce children cannot be measured with the calipers that determine the variation in the wing-span of wasps. For a society which believes in love, be it sacred or profane, the physiological aspect of sex cannot be separated from its emotional and psychological concomitants without reducing it to meaninglessness. We need statistical studies of human sexual behaviour, but they should be studies of the behaviour of human beings, not of genital organs.

To revert to the original query of why the Kinsey report has had so widespread and ready an acceptance in the United States today, I think the answer can be found on two levels. It does not contain a single novel or disturbing idea, no new insight into human behaviour, such as caused the initial rejection of such pioneers as Havelock Ellis or Sigmund Freud; and its underlying attitudes are in complete congruence with some of the predominant, though not necessarily the most valuable, attitudes and ideas of contemporary, educated, urban Americans. To the extent that Justification by Numbers is a valid concept, the phenomenal sales of Dr. Kinsey's book demonstrate that he has provided what his public wanted.

Marie Lenéru

'Il n'y a d'histoire que de l'âme humaine' (Taine).

BY IRIS ORIGO

To be deaf is possibly not to hear, but certainly it is this : to hold your tongue. Whatever spontaneous feelings may move you, to resist the impulse to communicate them, to remember that *your* world, your moment, are not other people's : to hold your tongue. Whatever conversation or discussion may be reported to you, whatever enthusiasm or impatience they may awaken in you, whatever mordant retort—to bite your lips, remembering that the others are still talking and shouting : to hold your tongue. A *haute école* of self-control, of non-spontaneousness, of solitude and indifference.'

A *haute école*, indeed. The human being who has been put through these paces will emerge either broken, or singularly whole : self-aware, self-sufficient, armoured by fastidiousness, intelligence and pride. In the *Journal* of Marie Lenéru¹ we can watch the process at work.

The first 130 pages of the book are given up to the *Journal d'Enfance*, from the age of eleven to fifteen, and do little but set the stage on which the drama of Marie Lenéru will be enacted. The grand-daughter of Admiral Dauriac and the daughter of Lieutenant Alfred-François Lenéru, who died in his country's service at Teneriffe, Marie spent her childhood in the old house on the Rue de Siam, at Brest, the house in which—on June 2nd, 1875—she was born. 'No other town,' she wrote later, 'is like Brest : nowhere are there such narrow streets and such high houses—flat, grey houses that have not even the softness of darkness. They stand up as hard and pale as the sides of gorges ; a perpetual draught adds to the discomfort. The town should have been named *Angustiae*.' The young men who walk slowly down these narrow streets, she added, 'have the quiet gestures and the smouldering eyes of men who are nursing a secret pleasure—and that pleasure is departure. At eighteen they already know how to be off—very far, and for very long. My father, at their age,

¹ Marie Lenéru—*Journal*—Paris, Grasset, 1945.

walked as they do in the Rue de Siam ; and my grandfather and his father.' And here Marie, too, was brought up, in the traditions of the Navy ; a society which (like its equivalent in the Army) is a sort of limbo at the doors of the aristocratic Paradise, and which shares, with some of aristocracy's privileges, all its prejudices and conventions. Many years later, when Marie first saw her name in print, she wrote that it gave her satisfaction chiefly because it reminded her of the old days at Brest, 'when I believed myself to be a little girl known by the whole town, because I heard my name spoken in the crowd by my father's old sailors.' And elsewhere she admitted :

Short of Kings, like Madame, I should like my family to consist of nothing but sailors. . . . In my great-aunt's drawing-room, in which I am writing, there are some big pictures, the portraits of an Admiral, of a *commissaire général de marine*, and of two captains. . . . Oh yes, I am a daughter of the Navy in every nerve, in every cell, and I am grateful to destiny for having placed me—so easily disgusted, so prone to choosing, comparing, preferring—in a caste which I do not wish to repudiate.

These traditions of her childhood left an indelible impression ; they became both a bulwark behind which she could retreat, and a barrier. There was always one part of Marie Lenéru which belonged, quite unmistakably, to the French upper *bourgeoisie*, with all its qualities and its defects—which remained a *filles de la marine*.

In the early pages of her *Journal* there is only one other trait worth recording : her early religious development, the influence of the 'Imitation' and of Lacordaire. Otherwise the *Journal* is that of any other intelligent, vital little girl, until—at the age of thirteen—an attack of measles was followed by acute pain in the ears, and within a year, by total deafness. Soon after an illness of the cornea affected the sight, first of one eye and then of both. For three years the *Journal* ceased. When it began again—Marie was then eighteen—it was preceded by a heading from Marcus Aurelius : '*Accoutume-toi, même aux choses que tu désespères d'accomplir.*' In the interval Marie had made acquaintance with darkness and solitude.

* * *

A life-sentence can be pronounced in many ways ; and there are as many ways of meeting it. What is common to all who have received it—the consumptive, the paralysed, the deaf, the blind—is the absence of a fixed point on the mind's horizon. The sufferer

can never say, with the superb confidence of the healthy, 'Next winter I shall climb Mount Everest—next summer finish my book.' All plans, all hopes, have a conditional clause: and the horizon, instead of receding, is always closing in. Sometimes almost imperceptibly. It is only after a year that suddenly, looking back, he realises that the walls have come closer; there is a little less air to breathe.

Different temperaments meet or defy the sentence with varying kinds of courage. Each sufferer has his own particular torment, different from anyone else's. For Katherine Mansfield, the perpetual quest for health in unfamiliar cheap hotels—from Bandol to Looe, from Mentone to Sierre: the draughty room, the suspicious landlady, the new doctor; the appraising stare of strangers. 'Oh, how I loathe hotels! I know I shall die in one. I shall stand in front of a crochet dressing-table cover, pick up a long invisible hairpin left by the last "lady," and die with disgust.' Waiting for the post, waiting for her husband to come out to her:

You know it's madness to love and live apart. . . . Last time when I came back to France, do you remember how we swore never again? But the time comes and there's nothing else to do and before you say Jack Knife, we're apart again, going through it all again. Shall I be in Malaga next winter, or Algiers? But how tired the dice get of being rattled and thrown!

For Barbellion, life in a single room—towards the end, in a single chair, 'moving eight feet to my bed at night, and eight feet from it to my chair in the morning'; consumed by egotism, ambition and frustration, struggling perpetually with pain and poverty. 'A paralytic, a screaming infant, two women, a cat and canary, shut up in a tiny cottage with no money, the War still on and food always scarcer day by day.' And yet rejecting pity. 'You would pity me, would you? I am lonely, penniless, paralysed, and just turned twenty-eight. But I snap my fingers in your face and with equal arrogance I pity you, I pity you for your smooth good luck and the stagnant serenity of your mind. I prefer my own torment.'

For Marie Lenéru, a more normal external life, with family affection and care; but total inner isolation. This was not a result of her own temperament, but largely of her malady. Marie was not, by nature, a solitary being; she was vital, '*participante*,' intensely interested in people; she could not believe in this desert island on which she found herself marooned:

Physically I certainly exist for others more than for myself, for

they can see and hear me. That is what is most horrible—and that is what has happened to me, that untouched little girl, so curious and so sheltered when people talked about those freaks, the blind, the dumb and the deaf. . . . It is the process of dying, separation.

And four years later she added :

There is no suffering more inhuman than deafness. A blind man can only live through other people ; matter disappears, a contact is established from one soul to the other, there is a meeting-point. But when speech disappears, human beings just become objects—distant, detached, difficult to approach, unable to do anything to make us happy.

A few years later, she changed her opinion about the relative gravity of the two afflictions—or perhaps, about the value of human relationships. When her eyesight was beginning to improve, in 1904, she wrote that the separation from other people caused by her deafness, now distressed her far less than being cut off from *things* by her blindness. Even to understand human beings, she maintained, sight was more important than hearing. 'One *sees* intelligence far more than one hears it. People don't always say transcendental things, but if they are *capable* of saying them, it is always visible.'

In the first years of her illness, however, Marie was still suffering from both afflictions—and it was then that she made her decision : '*I will not be resigned*. I shall perhaps one day accept sacrifice, but not resignation. I cannot remain passive, even with regard to suffering. I have missed the life of a happy woman : I must invent another one.' But of what could this new, this 'invented' life consist ? 'Where I now stand two paths are open to me : absolute scepticism and discouragement—or faith and a passionate vocation or whatever may come.' The girl who had nourished on St. Thomas à Kempis and Lacordaire could only choose the second alternative. 'To wear my trial like a religious habit. . . . God has consulted me, he has not waited for the consent of my vows, he has made of me a Carmelite. . . . May the spirit of St. Theresa be granted me !'

Her malady, to be endurable, must be accepted not as an affliction but a challenge. 'God has opened wide to me the doors of the intelligible, the superior world ; how far have I adventured in it ?' Confronted by this challenge alike to her intelligence and her pride, Marie not only met it ; she ran towards it. 'To accept my life I must *prefer* it. . . . The most discouraging punishment

that God could inflict upon me to-day, would be to cure me. Had it been granted to me to be suddenly freed, I would have thought very seriously before accepting the offer.'

But the months passed; Marie's isolation continued. She still led the life of a practising Catholic; she attended Mass daily, she went to Confession and partook of the Sacraments. But gradually her conformance began to take on the colour of an æsthetic preference, rather than a movement of the spirit or the heart. 'Prayer and the Sacraments give order to life; if I cannot make an act of piety out of them, I can still hold to them as a rhythm.' These are not the accents of someone whose faith is nourishing them. 'I pray and I do not hope.' She did not hope—and did she indeed believe? 'One doubts in proportion to one's capacity to believe; it is the same instrument! I mistrust the priest in our century who has not been capable of doubt. Virginal faith was still possible for Bossuet; incredulity in the seventeenth century was something inferior. It has only taken on its full value in our time.'

It was about this time that her eyesight underwent a sudden improvement ('the stars are coming back to me, one by one')—and with the return of hope, she was once again able to pray. 'God knows with what emotion I ask to be given back to myself, whole! It is the first time, I believe, for many years that I have prayed simply and violently to be cured, to be cured while it is still time. *Mon Dieu, foudroyez-moi de ma guérison!*' And now began some of the most painful days of Marie's life. Hope is more intolerable than renouncement, its chain more dragging. 'My only life is waiting. . . . Literally I count the hours. Looking at my watch, looking at the calendar, it is always, always the same thought, that a less intolerable future is approaching. . . . Oh, now I have no vocation left for martyrdom, no Jansenist acceptance. I passionately want to recover.'

This year—1898, when she was twenty-three—was the turning-point of Marie Lenéru's *Journal*, and of her life. 'So long as I counted on God, I was invulnerable. The career that lay before me was always in the ascendant—and as for happiness, I know how to wait. Now nothing is left to me, but me.'

Each of us—not often, or it would not be bearable—has moments of insight in which, in a sudden flash, the fundamental pattern of our life, shorn of accessory incidents and ornaments, is laid before us. We know then that the limitations, the incompletenesses, which we had tried to persuade ourselves were merely single episodes, accidentally repeating themselves, are instead part of the

very stream of our lives ; they will return again, inexorably, upon the next tide, because they are *us*. We know that this, and no other, will be our life. For Marie Lenéru the recurring pattern was to be isolation—and it was now that, for the first time, she realised it. Her prayers had not been granted, her faith had deserted her. She must come to terms with ‘only me.’

It is now that her character begins to reveal itself, in all its integrity and arrogance, its fastidiousness and pride. Many invalids, thrown back upon themselves, have taken refuge in varying attitudes—more or less sincere, more or less picturesque—of resignation or courage, of faith or stoicism. These attitudes, these garments decently cloaking frustration and suffering, are not wholly insincere or wholly valueless. Devoted relations and friends foster and admire the myth that has been created—the image of the stoic, the martyr or the saint. And the sufferer himself is fortified and sustained—except in sudden bleak moments of reality—by the virtues which gradually and after all genuinely become his own. The face fits itself to the mask.

But Marie Lenéru would have none of all this. Not only her courage, but her impatience, her uncompromising intolerance of the second-best, saved her from what she herself called ‘these acrobatics of suffering.’—‘Build myself a happiness out of what is left, amuse myself by picking up my broken pieces? The blind have sculpted, the deaf given lectures, armless men have painted with their toes, Mme G—— wrote verses to the sun and to her husband, whom she could not see. It shocks me!’ Even in the article which, a few years later, she wrote in the *Mercure de France* about Helen Keller, her admiration for that young woman’s courage and achievement was tempered by something like aversion for so tragically abnormal an effort. ‘Looking at the most remarkable *tour de force*, something in us rebels and even turns away ; there seems to be a price that must not be paid.’

Not only for others, but for herself, Marie rejected all facile, false consolations. She knew that a Spartan silence and resignation, or even the mere passage of time, do not bring appeasement ; there is no way out. ‘We get accustomed to nothing, habit makes nothing easier, time does not mend. The repercussions of every evil are infinite, our losses absolute. Only we are absent-minded, unintelligent, as scatter-brained as monkeys, too coarse to suffer as much as we should. We console ourselves by mistake.’ As for courage, Marie flung back even that last prop :

I am so charming and gay, they say. Well, yes, I am gay, because I have some wit. One laughs when one is amused as one

jumps when one is nervous. . . . After all, what is courage? Of what use is it? What is this pose? Is one any the less duped and caught? . . . They say to me, 'Luckily, you have been able to make a life for yourself—no one else in your place would have managed so well.' They call this a life! They call this managing! . . .

Those were the bad days, in which 'the impossibility of going on living is evident, in which following the movements of the fingers which try to talk to me makes me impatient to the point of tears,' (Marie could not then see well enough to lip-read) . . . 'And with all this a dulled sensibility, as in a nightmare. . . . Twenty-four years old. I am tired of being me.'

Nevertheless it was true that she had 'managed,' that she had made a life for herself. And the first thing that strikes us about it is this: it was not an invalid's life. 'I have been placed among the unhappy and wounded human beings, but I do not belong there. Illness has not taught me their attitude nor their language. I am a stranger in misfortune, a traveller who has lost her way. I am here by mistake—and it pleases me to pretend that it is for my pleasure!'

Once, and only once more, shall we hear Marie asking for the impossible—for happiness:

Last night I slipped out of the drawing-room behind the shutters, and soaked myself in the moonlight. I ardently asked for all the happiness I could imagine. Ah, I no longer think it vulgar now to ask for happiness. . . . This life may be a bankruptcy; let us at least lose some great desires! . . . I asked to be given back my youth, my fine eyes, my music and my wit; I asked for beauty, talent, riches, fame, love, friendship, the adventures which speed up existence—everything, in a word, that is life.

And then—she stops short:

And yet—to have nothing at all would also be a fine thing. I will live more intensely in my immobility than others in their activity. I will live more in my solitude than a hundred others in their passions. I will create for myself loves so strange, so new and proud that I will dismiss the other vulgar joys like old-fashioned outworn garments.

Is this, too, after all, an '*acrobatie de la douleur*'? If it is, this is the last time we shall find her performing it. Marie Len  ru had made her choice; henceforth she would 'invent her own life,' weave her own web; she became a writer.

'To write—not as a form of speech, or even for writing's sake,

but in order *to be*, to enter more and more completely into one's own thought and one's own heart.' But Marie was too clever not to know that talent and intensity are not enough. 'Intelligence is not a gift of Nature but a habit of the mind.' So, first of all, with the same formidable zest and concentration, she set herself to learn. '*Apprendre—apprehendere—saisir au passage, s'accrocher, se cramponner.*' She read Latin (Cicero and Tacitus—'*les grands seigneurs que ces républicains!*'), German, Italian (D'Annunzio), English (Shelley and *The Origin of Species*). And all this reading had to be done slowly, laboriously, with a magnifying-glass, for her eyesight was still unable to manage ordinary print. But now, at any rate in those hours in which she was working, Marie was happy—'contented in the Latin sense, and provisionally, of course.' Her inextinguishable energy had found an outlet. 'I get up feverishly. . . . I am preparing the future. . . . When I feel myself carried along by my work like a ship in full sail I am gay, I feel young, fresh, supple.' But she had not the scholar's temperament; already she knew that her reading was only a means to an end. 'Writing? Do what I will, the time will come when I shan't be able to do without it. . . . Writing has always seemed to me a sacrifice of the woman to the writer. Well, the woman is already lost for me; let's save what is left!'

The first attempts, naturally, were laborious. 'I have tried to write anything whatever, to sharpen my claws. . . . I find myself so clumsy that it is like a shower of cold water.' But she persevered. 'Will what I have written ever satisfy me? Shall I ever feel, yes, this and nothing else is the idea that is me, by which I shall be judged? Among the thousands of shades of meaning which can alter my thoughts, the thousands of variations which can deform it, shall I find the one which is right, which, after all, is the most *me*?'

Her choice of a subject was self-revealing: a monograph on St. Just, the coldest, hardest, most aloof figure of the French Revolution. '*St. Just,*' wrote Barrès, '*c'est le roman de Marie Lenéru.*' His youth, his taciturnity, his pride, his aristocratic bearing—'*cette prédestination au pouvoir et ces perfections de Prince selon Machiavel*'—these were the qualities which appealed to her and which she described—'without any *parti pris*, social or political'—in a style singularly concise, lucid and unemotional. 'His strength and his rigidity,' she wrote, 'can be excellent company'—and though she admitted his cruelty, it was without distaste. 'Nothing,' she quoted from one of his own speeches, 'resembles a virtue like a great crime.' She admired his 'rational' fanaticism, his 'Domi-

nican faith in the nothingness of the human person'; she justified even his methodical, unrelenting pitilessness, '*cette dureté simple, sincère et pure.*' Pity, she maintained, is a luxury, like happiness; it has nothing to do with justice. 'Justice, like religion, is not a human relationship; it only deals with the relationship of one man to another by accident, and so to speak, by corruption. Justice is the relationship of man to an idea.' 'Was he very intelligent?' she asked—herself too intelligent not to be aware of what she justly called his '*grandes niaiseries.*' But these, she maintained, were partly a question of fashion. 'To-day we expect intelligence to take a different attitude,' but St. Just exploited with a full virtuosity (it is the right word) the ideas of his own time. And finally—for this was Marie Lenéru's weakness—she was dazzled by the sheer spectacle of his power. 'At the age of twenty he already knows all the secrets of leadership: he knows how to impose his will, how to give orders, how to be more active than others, how to bear himself, and how to be silent.' If we cannot wholly share her estimate, we can see its origin: in St. Just Marie saw the man she would have liked to be. What she could not resist in him—the fallen angel, the tyrant who might have been a saint—was the sheer intensity of his *élan*. It is of him that she was thinking when, many years later in a letter to a friend, she quoted the words of the *Imitation*: 'Idle and murmuring servant, blush that there should be men who seek their perdition more earnestly than you your salvation, and whose passion and crime hold for them a greater attraction than for you the truth.'

In his preface of St. Just, Barrès has described Marie Lenéru's first visit to him, bringing her manuscript with her. (Of this visit, Marie wrote in her *Journal* that she would care little for an emperor or a Pope, but could not disregard this man.) '*Je fus frappé,*' he says, '*par ces pages si passionnément volontaires et par la situation pathétique de celle qui me les regardait lire, sans pouvoir m'en donner aucun commentaire, sinon par l'expression violente de sa physionomie.*' (Marie was never dumb, but, after many years of deafness, she had become self-conscious about speaking to strangers, fearing to be betrayed by some uncertain or harsh modulation of her voice, and on this occasion she was '*prodigieusement intimidée.*')

To Barrès she seemed like one of the figures in the group of the Laocoon, strangled by serpents, but eternally struggling for freedom. 'This magnificent attitude,' he wrote, 'this will to face and deny the sentence of destiny, explains her *St. Just.*'

After *St. Just*, and the further success of a poem in prose about Helen Keller, *La Vivante*, which was awarded a prize by the com-

mittee of *Le Journal*, Marie Lenéru turned to a new literary form : the theatre. Her first play, *Les Affranchis*, was sent to Catulle Mendès and was considered by him 'une pièce infiniment belle, haute, poignante.' It was awarded the prize of '*Vie Heureuse*,' and it was performed (on October 10th, 1910) at the Odéon, achieving an immediate success with the young *avangarde* of the Parisian intellectuals. Marie, who was present on the first night, appeared on the stage to receive their applause, her first taste of *la gloire*. Henceforth, she was established in Parisian literary circles. She formed a few friendships : with Mary Duclaux ('*religieuse, jeune, avec ses beaux cils attentifs*'), with Blum, with François de Curel, her 'literary father,' with Fernand Gregh ; and to these friendships she added a small circle of celebrated acquaintances : Rachilde, Mme Henri de Régnier, and Mme de Noailles—'*l'air d'un aigle . . . mais pas les manières d'un aigle ; gestes de vieille dame ou de prédicateur de campagne. Elle frise le ridicule.*'

Like all Marie's subsequent plays—*Le Redoutable*, *La Triomphatrice*, *La Paix*, *Le Bonheur des Autres*, *Les Lutteurs*, *La Maison sur le Roc*, *Le Mahdi*—*Les Affranchis* is a drama of ideas. 'The brain,' Marie Lenéru maintained, 'is psychologically the true heart of all the emotions. . . . How can one express one's heart, if not with what is finest in one's brain ?' It is at once the weakness and the strength of her plays that such passion as they hold is always an intellectual passion ; Marie recognises no emotional crisis that is not also a moral or a spiritual problem.

Let us at once admit that—in spite of the interest that they awakened at the time, and in spite of a certain intensity and vividness—Marie Lenéru's plays are now frankly dated ; it is not through them that she will be remembered. Long before their publication, when her only vehicle of expression was still her *Journal*, Marie had exclaimed : 'No, no, I won't be like Amiel, capable of writing nothing but his *Journal* all his life !' Yet it is most certainly the *Journal*—only published four years after her death—that is her outstanding work ; it is through this that she will live.

For Marie, in spite of all her intelligence and all her critical brilliance, was not at heart an intellectual. "*Cela console*," said Goethe (of writing poetry)—'I must confess that producing a work of art comforts me no more than twenty minutes of Swedish exercises. It keeps one fit—and allows one to dispense with being comforted.'

Above all she had a marked distaste for intellectual *côteries* :

I have discovered that in an intellectual society individual intelligence is no more common than anywhere else, and its absence is

more tiresome, for not to speak in a superior manner of superior subjects is both boring and ridiculous. *Les banalités de la transcendance font adorer celles de la politesse.* . . . All these men and women who 'take an interest in everything,' who know about books, pictures, music, well-informed and provident bourgeois who do good intellectual deals. . . . People who learn every language, take every journey—and will so obviously always remain mediocrities!

The same rejection of the second-rate, the shoddy, extended to her choice of books. 'I can't go on reading: mannerism everywhere. One cannot avoid *les manies spirituelles*. Ah, the angels, lamps and doors of Maeterlinck! The mirrors, crystals, chandeliers and bells of Rodenbach! The arrows, desires and flying darts of D'Annunzio!' And a few days later: 'The *Mémoires* of Mlle de Meysenburg. . . . How this idealist succeeds in rendering the ideal about as attractive as an old dress of hers, which she is willing to lend you to wear out! . . . Oh, the maddening bathos of "beautiful souls!" And this lady was a friend of Nietzsche's. . . .'

No, it was not in this world that Marie Lenéru could be at ease. Always, too, she rebelled against the suggestion that the man of letters was superior to the man of action:

God knows that I am all for the intelligence and for what it keeps alive. Without it nothing is worth while, even in love. . . . But the philosophers, poor creatures—human aristocracy does not lie there. . . . One must have a brain, but one must also have wit, and an elegant and active body. . . . One must have character and power—there are rulers and statesmen in the world. . . . The greatest charm in life is to live with well-bred people.

It is in this taste of Marie Lenéru for *la tenue*—an elegance of bearing to match an elegance of mind—that we see her greatest resemblance to Marie Bashkirtseff, with whom she has inevitably been compared. 'I would rather be celebrated for my way of wearing a frock of Chevers, than for all the talent and ugliness of the George Eliots and De Staëls.' And on coming back from a fashionable wedding, she commented, 'Both of them were equally tall, elegant and well turned out. . . . If one were honest, one would admit that money is the half of happiness; it makes it so much more attractive!' Both these sentences might have been written by Marie Bashkirtseff. Indeed if Marie Lenéru's prayer for recovery, at the age of twenty-four, had been granted her, one is tempted to wonder whether the rest of her *Journal* might not greatly have resembled that of her precursor. The traits in

common of the two young women are evident: intelligence, ambition, egotism, impatience, industry and pride. There is even a physical resemblance, of which Marie Lenéru was herself aware. 'They say that physically Marie Bashkirtseff is like me. Perhaps—the same full cheeks and lively expression. . . . I like her, though we are very different. My childhood's programme was *la grande sainteté cloîtrée*—but only after having renounced a princely luxury.'

Perhaps the strongest resemblance between the two young women lies in their equal determination to leave no lemon unsqueezed. Marie Bashkirtseff, at the age of thirteen, sacked a teacher who had arrived five minutes late: '*C'est ma vie entière qu'elle me vole, en me volant mes leçons!*' Marie Lenéru was no less impatient:

I am haunted by this idea of *perfectionner l'instant*, of freeing each particle of existence from that heavy weight which causes laziness to dominate all our actions. Human indifference—that is what has astonished me most on earth. No one seems to mind that he must leave, on dying, so many unexplored possibilities that have touched us with their wings and that can now never become us, the best part of ourselves.

Like Marie Bashkirtseff, though with far less opportunity of satisfying her desires, Marie Lenéru passionately desired every form of experience. 'Yes, wit and goodness and laughter and malice, *la toilette* and change and noise, one must love all this—because there is nothing else. . . . And it is the finest of miracles that, faced by the fifth-rate melodrama of human existence, men have been able to invent this astonishing, necessary, prodigious frivolity.'

This appreciation of frivolity by the essentially unfrivolous, this zest for life of the invalid, partake of the passion of the exile for his native land. It is an insatiable nostalgia: it can become an obsession.

Marie Lenéru, imprisoned in her deafness—Marie Bashkirtseff, with her unformulated presentiment of her early death—fasten upon life with an octopus-like tenaciousness of the imagination, to embrace all that life can hold—more at once than any single life can ever hold. '*Je veux aller dans le monde, je veux y briller, je veux être riche, je veux des tableaux, des palais, des bijoux; je veux être le centre d'un cercle politique brillant, littéraire, bienfaisant, frivole. Je veux, je veux. . .*' That is Marie Bashkirtseff. And Marie Lenéru, too, will write '*Je veux.*'—'*Ce mot est toute ma manière d'espérer.*'

But just as the exile's passion for his country holds a faint unreality,

so there is—for all her passionate affirmations—something not wholly convincing about Marie Lenéru's 'love of life.'

Her cousin, Fernande Dauriac, who perhaps was dearer to her in childhood than anyone else, and who says that then '*Marie était aimante jusqu'au frémissement*,' is the first to admit that the *Journal* does not reveal this side of her nature. '*Le coeur n'y trouve pas son compte*.' ¹ Marie writes, after her eyesight had begun to improve, 'I love life, I love it prodigiously. If I catch sight of myself in a looking-glass, I feel as if I were bringing myself a mysterious and intoxicating piece of news.' But we feel that all this is the emotion of a spectator, not of a protagonist.

The world of ordinary human beings attracts and perplexes her; she savours its beauty and variety. The picture is observed—through a pane of glass—with clear discrimination, with an intelligence acute enough to include even goodness, even tenderness. She wonders whether it would not, after all, be possible 'to transport the tension and energy of solitude into a relationship *avec de vrais semblables*. Not love, perhaps, but rare, exalted nervous friendships.' But at the end—it is always her own face that she meets in the glass.

Marie herself gives us the clue. '*C'est l'ennui qui m'a le plus deshumanisée*. . . . The boredom I am speaking of is that of prison. It ravages even egotism.'

Nevertheless, as the years passed, her longing for what she had missed increased. 'I've taken some time about it,' she wrote at the age of thirty. 'But I'm beginning to love normality.' Walking down the gay boulevards filled with people, she suddenly found herself weeping. 'The children have such bright eyes, the eyes we had at Brest. I feel like taking one of their heads and burying it in my furs and saying, "You are life, the normal life that I have never known."' And shortly before her death, during the war, she wrote to a friend:

It's true, there is terrible mourning in France. But, looking at all that has been taken, do you know what I am thinking? This: how much happiness there was in the world, to be lost! No one feels a greater rebellion than I do against this crime and sacrilege, the destruction of fragile and precious human happiness—happiness dispensed to the crowd—happiness that I shall never have known.

Early in the morning, as she lies in bed, she takes refuge in day-dreams. She pictures 'all that might have been, the person who

¹ Fernande Dauriac: Marie Lenéru, '*La Revue Bleue*,' Paris, 21 Aug., 1926.

might have been me, if a little girl of thirteen had not gone out to supper one day on a journey, in a house where another little girl was going to have measles.' Her fancy takes her to some Mediterranean sea-port, Algiers or Pera—'waking, as in my childhood, to the sound of the ships' guns.' Her husband, in her dreams, is on the bridge: the children are singing a creole air; her old Breton maid comes in, saying, 'Madame, the stations have been allotted.' Laying in bed in her cabin and looking out over the clear, transparent seas:

I would follow the movements of the ships taking station, the other ships saluting us; two sailors, above my head, would interminably wash the whaler. Now and again, visitors would come in: the doctor, the second in command, the chaplain. 'Captain, the Admiral's barge is coming alongside!' I would be simple and without desires. . . .

Yes, here is a different Marie, a romantic. At the age of twenty-four she had asked herself, 'Have I perhaps got no heart? It has been so necessary to make myself invulnerable that in all circumstances, without exception, I have been frightened by my own detachment.' At that time she could write of love as something that she merely considered desirable, 'in order to have had all the interesting experiences in the world. It is something that must be added to life, but that would not be at all sufficient for me.' Had she changed her mind?

At the age of thirty-six, according to her own account, '*l'expérience sentimentale*' was still lacking. But she greatly resented the critics' assumption that the austerity of the highly intellectualised passion in her first play, *Les Affranchis*, was due to this:

I am the age of Mlle de Lespinasse, but were I to have her experience to-morrow, I am absolutely convinced that my critics and I should be just where we are now. . . . I will add that I consider myself far more advanced emotionally than many women whom I have seen experiencing all the familiar phases of marriage or love-affairs. Life holds what one puts into it. . . .

Nevertheless one feels that the door is open, as it was not twelve years before:

If the day came when I could lip-read really well, I think I should like to marry. Even eliminating the best sort of marriage, that of one's own choice, there still remains the marriage of ambition—or, failing this, that of self-sacrifice. . . . I should not like to die unmarried. Celibacy is bearable, because everything is

bearable, but it is, like death, a great sadness—and as dreary for a man as for a woman. . . .

Moreover, she refused to admit that it was now getting late. 'If I were to encounter to-morrow *la belle occasion sentimentale*, I would not regret these last years. I would not say it has come too late. . . . I do not believe in youth at all. One only becomes sincere, only becomes oneself, after the age of thirty.'

The truth is that the only human love of which Marie Lenéru would have been capable was a dedication hardly less austere, hardly less complete, than that which in her youth she had vowed to religious life. She read Blum's book on marriage :

It is so difficult for me to understand love outside of marriage. . . . A man would love me because he could be the whole of my life—its every-day face, presence, tenderness—and not because he has over me, I don't know what queer rights of possession or disturbance. . . . Life in common, that is what most impresses a solitary like me, the daily returns to each other. One must totally lack any spiritual imagination not to feel that the real ties lie there. . . .

She read the love-letters to his fiancée of Colonel Moll, a French Colonial Officer who was killed on duty, and at last was satisfied :

Here at last is love, as a human need. It is not love as a luxury, but the love that is necessary to a man, as indispensable as bread to the poor. Not certainly that of Châteaubriand, of Alfred de Musset, or of Mme de Noailles. Oh, my great colleagues, how little prestige your sentiments have always had for me ! This is a love which one must take seriously.

Women who have in them an admixture of masculine qualities are apt to be singularly exacting in their choice of a lover. Their feminine side requires that they should be able to consider him as their superior, but the Amazon in them finds it very difficult to discover this superiority. Their best chance of doing so is to choose a man whose activities lie in a field completely outside their own experience ; they can then consider superior all that is unfamiliar. For Marie Lenéru—'*enfermée dans le bloc d'un sort immobile*'—it was inevitable that romance should be personified by the man of action.

If I should ever marry [she had written in her youth], it would be with a great nostalgic regret not to have married a sailor. . . . Is it atavism in me, is it an atrophy of the critical sense, this impossibility of accepting a man who has not got the attributes of a soldier ? . . . What a marvellous career !

(It is of Colonel Moll that she is writing.)

The supreme command over a territory larger than France, where all is still to be created. . . . The postal service, the roads, the industries . . . justice rendered at the door of one's tent, like Louis XI at the Crusades, all the people flocking round you. . . . To travel for months, to ride at all hours of the day and night at the head of one's troops and camels. . . .

And, she liked to think, all this belonged a little to her too, was part of her heritage. 'In my grandfather's and even in my father's time, the colonies belonged to the Navy—Admirals were their rulers, after having been their conquerors.

'To return to Colonel Moll, is it not worth more than anything else in the world to say to a woman: "I will send you a copy of every order and every instruction I shall issue." . . . What a fine noviciate, such a separation! A virile respect and reserve, no theatrical airs, already a conjugal simplicity—but a good, realistic impatience in the anxiety and details about the dates of the postal service. . . . Is it wrong to think that this hard engagement and the cruelty of the end were yet the best and most real thing that life could give to a woman? What would Colonel Moll's marriage have been?'

What, we are equally tempted to ask, would have been the marriage of Marie Lenéru? The Colonial Officer, the 'man of action,' who would have fulfilled her romantic fancy, would not have been likely to meet her critical intelligence; the man of letters who could match her intellect would not have kindled her imagination. Moreover, it is not possible to live for many years as Marie Lenéru had lived, without becoming very unsuited to married life. 'I mistrust love intensely, as I do all collaboration.' She was unable to conceive any partnership for which it would seem worth while to give up her spiritual independence:

No one possesses the life I need, no man or woman holds what I lack. . . . However much awaited, however much longed-for you may be, [she cried to her imaginary lover] (*Vous que je ne croyais pas encore fondu*) you will never be my whole life, you cannot be enough, you alone, to preserve me from the past. The terrifying past, the past that would have killed any other woman, has so harrowed my heart that, in spite of the great appeal that can never be defeated, I don't know if I shall ever be able, love, to give myself up entirely—to trust myself entirely to you.

What was it that held her back? An egotism as profound as Marie Bashkirtseff's? An unconquerable asceticism? Or, more

vulgarly, the taste of sour grapes? The truth, surely, lies rather in her own words: 'My instinct for self-conservation . . . it is like forced vocations; they are hard, it is true, but one does not give up one's habit.'

A forced vocation. In Marie Lenéru's posthumous play, *La Maison sur le Roc*, a young girl who later breaks off her engagement to become a nun, tells the story of Mme Swetchline, who, in her childhood, passionately wanted a watch. But when her father gave her one, she returned it to him—'Because there is something even better than having a watch—and that is to be able to do without it.'

That is the portrait of Marie Lenéru. She had learned to do without her watch, and herein she put her pride. But is pride alone enough to nourish a lifetime? And is the total rejection of pity (Barbellion's refusal and Marie Lenéru's) indeed always a proof of strength?

The various strands of a human being's life are so confusedly, inextricably interwoven that the most perceptive observer can hardly disentangle them and see which is the most significant thread—what in Italian is called *il filo conduttore*. But sometimes after death the threads fall into the right place: the web is woven, a pattern is formed.

What were the strands of Marie Lenéru's life? The naval tradition—'*la caste que je ne veux pas renier*'—the intellectual achievement—the nostalgic ardour for experience—and finally, through all and above all, the religious inner life. Now at the end, looking at the whole pattern, one can hardly doubt that it was this last that was *il filo conduttore*. I am not suggesting that, if she had lived longer, she would necessarily have gone back to the orthodox fold. Her doubts were too fundamental; they covered too wide a field. 'The Church only presupposes the single heresy, the "controverted point." She says, "Expose your doubts to me," as if there were a single object of doubt, as if one had "some doubts." Doubts! But if one had them, one would believe.'

And yet, as the diary goes on, what is it that emerges? In the year in which Marie lost her faith she had written 'I can only see two futures for me: a stall in a Benedictine abbey—or one of those great talents which are equal to any rank. A come-down, this—but it is not easy to turn right-about and to find an equivalent for great holiness.'

No, it is not easy—and, as the *Journal* continues, it becomes increasingly clear that she did not find it. 'I don't know where I get this liturgical soul; I have all the instincts of the monastic

life.' Never did she lose her nostalgia for the other, greater prize. *Rien ne console, parce que rien ne remplace.* 'Men have not naïvely fooled themselves in seeking an eternal life. . . . It is a limited future that makes the past unbearable.'

Of the numerous strands of her existence, the intellectual life—after its prizes had been won—had been rejected. The emotional life had been renounced. What then remained but 'that vital energy of solitude, towards which our preferences so strangely tend?' Is not this—whatever label we may give it—the religious life?

* * *

After the beginning of the War of 1914 the *Journal* gradually tails off, and is completed, up to Marie's death in 1918, by some extracts from her letters. Many of these are concerned with her work for the pacifist cause—which is the subject also of her last play, *La Paix*, and of several articles published by *L'Œuvre* and *L'Intransigeant*. It is a measure of the strength of her convictions that in spite of her family tradition, her own patriotic feelings and the dismay of her relations, she continued to support this cause. 'I've followed the opposite direction to most people. Previously a believer in aristocracy, autocracy, slavery—this war has made me a socialist and a pacifist, and in favour of parliamentary control.' It is not only the suffering of war that she rebels against, but its unnecessary. 'This giant plague is only a windmill.' Passionately does she deny all the familiar arguments in favour of war's inevitability:

Men left to themselves would have a passion for peace: each single one of these madmen has cried, 'what madness.' But as men have always done in the face of suffering, they have mysticised the plague. The greatest danger perhaps is the lyrical rhetoric with which we always veil ourselves in the face of death—even gratuitous and 'invented' death, as Marx calls it. What revolts me in regard to war is precisely the absence of that inevitability, which so much verbal habit and sentimental rhetoric have accorded to it.

Thirty years later, these pages are depressing reading.

Early in May 1918, Marie Lenéru—though much disliking the appearance of running away at such a time—felt that she must return to Brittany with her mother, who could not bear the strain of the bombardment of Paris. At Lorient, Spanish influenza was raging. After a short and violent illness, on September 23rd, Marie

succumbed to it, at the age of forty-three. During her illness she returned to the religious practices of her childhood, receiving Extreme Unction and murmuring after the Responses: 'God has seen my martyrdom; He will forgive me.' After this she retired into that remote, unfurnished ante-room in which the last few hours before death are sometimes spent—'already beyond the ways of our comfortable human days.' When her cousin asked her how she felt, she replied, *A merveille* and did not speak again. 'I felt,' wrote her mother, 'that she did not wish to be linked again to any part of this life that was leaving her. Her gentleness and her silence were terrible to me.' Later on, her bones were transferred to the Naval Cemetery at Brest, where she rests beside her father, with a sailor's anchor engraved upon her tomb.

* * *

In an early page of her *Journal*, during one of Marie Lenéru's visits to Brittany, she described a walk on the sand at Trezshir. The passage is perhaps worth recording, as symbolic of her whole life:

The other morning, at low tide, I went forward on the damp sand, as smooth as a mirror—and then the reflection became so perfect, the sky sank down into it so far, that I could not go on—seized by a sudden giddiness, walking into space.

The Extraordinary Petal

BY HUGO CHARTERIS

MR. POTTER, who was short-sighted and unable to keep good discipline, often told his pupils that God was everywhere and saw everything. This diplomatic assertion did not prey upon the boys' minds. Midnight feasts continued and all retribution divine and magisterial was usually avoided by the calm urgent whisper 'Cave! Pots coming,' which like an efficient air-raid warning left all the time in the world before the slow danger materialised. What the eye does not see the heart does not grieve over: Mr. Potter believed his flock hung upon his lips and quailed before his wrath.

With the exception perhaps of Petal.

Standing with coffee-cups during Break Mr. Potter addressed the junior Masters. 'Dear, dear,' he said. 'Petal is an unsatisfactory child.'

The junior Masters stirred their cups and waited for Mr. Potter to go on as they knew he would.

'I think he's receiving assistance with his work—I do.' Mr. Potter was looking high out of the window, he took a sip and then continued his search of the summer distances as though the truth about Petal were to be found amongst the elm-tops.

'For weeks his work was of a very low standard—now for two days in Maths he has not made a mistake and he has arrived at his answers without calculation. It's not his own work—oh no, not if I know anything of boys.'

The new master, late of the R.A.F., went so far as to mistake Mr. Potter's silence as an invitation to talk. 'Poor old Petal,' he laughed. 'He's all right. He's a queer type, sir, but if he could fatten up a bit and get that eye straightened out he'd get along fine.'

Mr. Potter seemed not to hear. He mused for a while and then turning said, 'Edwards—if I were to express an opinion on

aeroplanes after one short flight you would be justified in thinking me presumptuous.'

At chapel that evening Potter took what he called 'his little minute' alone with the school. To-night the little minute was to be mainly for Petal's ears.

'There are some sins,' he said, closing his eyes and opening them, 'we can get away with. These sins are the hardest to control—we think we have nothing but profit from them—no danger of being found out.' Luxuriating in his drapery, Potter walked a little confiding distance down the aisle. He developed his theme—hinted at forgery, the practice of printing false money and ended with the words, 'Let me assure you that the power which helps us all when we pray is also beside us when we sin. We are observed.'

Petal was so short that he was out of sight. Mr. Potter contented himself with looking in his direction.

But the look and the sermon were wasted on Petal, for he was being pinched to distraction by his next-door neighbours. When he defended one thigh the other suffered. Even though each of his eyes was staring perpetually outwards, he still could not defend both sides at once. There was ink on his nose and cheeks but he wasn't crying. He never cried. Perhaps that was why people pinched him; they found him secret and obstinate—like his desk to which he had fitted a padlock.

Next day, addressing the class of which Petal had normally been the bottom, Mr. Potter said, 'I want you all to make a point of showing how you come by your answers: it's what the examiners will look for.'

During the long pen-scratched silence that followed, Mr. Potter walked up and down in his soft-soled shoes. He seemed to enjoy the noticeable effects of coming to a halt behind any one of the figures crouched awkwardly over its work. Once he said after a long halt behind Petal, 'Well, something interesting in the garden?'

Ten minutes before 'time' Mr. Potter clattered his chair, cleared his throat and said, 'Petal, bring yours up.'

Petal laid his work upon the magisterial desk without any awe and started to excavate his nose with an inky prong of a finger.

'You dirty little thing,' said Potter. 'Look at your face.' Petal's hand dropped to his side and one of his eyes gazed through its steel-frame straight and without expression at his accuser.

'And look at this,' Mr. Potter went on. 'Ink everywhere, over everything.' He paused and then said in a special voice, 'I think you do it on purpose.'

Petal stood with his inky face just showing between an inkpot and a Latin dictionary. In spite of the weakness, frailty and dirtiness they showed a secret obstinacy which stimulated persecution.

Mr. Potter looked up and then back again to Petal's copybook. Irritation and a sort of triumphant anger mounted in his face. He shut the book and laid it on one side. 'I'll see you at twelve,' he said.

Complacently over his morning coffee Mr. Potter announced that there was no longer any doubt that Petal was receiving help with his work.

'I wonder who can have given it to him,' said Mr. Edwards. 'He sits with Phillips—that would be a case of the blind leading the blind. And the answers are not in the back of that green book.'

'Since you are so interested Mr. Edwards, perhaps you would be so good as to be present when I interview Petal at twelve. It will help you to understand the wiles of boys.' Mr. Potter put down his cup with a complacent smile. He had made so many small boys admit once he had got them into his study: it would be a double pleasure to have the doubting Edwards there as a sort of second culprit.

At twelve exactly the passages churned with a mass of boys going in opposite directions and the swing door into the lavatories continually wheezed and sagged to a close. There was a noise of whistling, of feet knocking against the wall and of somebody pretending to be an aeroplane. Light steps approached the study door and there was a faint tap.

Mr. Edwards, already inside, turned to Mr. Potter, bent over and said, 'I think that's him now, Sir.'

Mr. Potter finished what he was writing. The knock was repeated no louder than before.

'Come in,' shouted Mr. Potter.

Petal came in, closed the door with both hands as though it were different from all other doors, and then stood on the edge of the room, one eye on Mr. Potter, the other slanting indefinitely towards the wall on his right. His stockings had shrunk down his legs and his right hand was dark with ink-stains. He plucked at the seat of his shorts.

'Come here,' said Mr. Potter. 'Stand there, please. Now Petal, unless I am mistaken you have a good deal to answer for. Your work for the first few weeks of term was consistently bad. You seldom gave a correct answer, but you showed the working such as it was. Now for three or four days you have been showing up correct answers without the working.'

Mr. Potter broke off for a full minute—then he said abruptly, 'Have you been cheating, Petal?'

Mr. Potter had developed the pause into a fine art. He knew it was the moment when the room talked for him: the shiny wooden clock with the silver inscription quietly insisting that time was on the side of authority, the playthings of Potter's children mocking the culprit with a suggestion of home not here, and the tuft of canes in the corner, the heart of the whole business yet somehow far less terrifying than the ritual with which they were surrounded.

Petal again plucked the seat of his shorts and Mr. Potter exulted: he felt this nervous movement was a prelude to speech—but Petal remained silent and after a minute had passed he again plucked the seat of his shorts. It was, in fact, just a habit which no crisis could make him neglect.

'You heard what I said, Petal.'

Mr. Edwards began to enjoy the situation. He was admiring the guts of Petal, giving him the benefit of the doubt, believing his silence to be actuated by neither terror nor stupidity; he was silently praising Petal, when Petal broke.

'Yes, sir,' he said in a flat whisper. 'I got help.'

For a moment Mr. Potter felt almost grateful to the boy: it had been a tense moment and he had been wondering what to do next. He savoured the moment in silence, got up from his chair and went to the window like a Hollywood tragedian on the receipt of bad news. He gave the impression that from now on he could share the trouble with Petal. Unpleasant formalities might have to be gone through—but it was in the spirit of 'we are in this together' that Potter eventually turned to Petal and said:

'This is very serious, Petal—we will all suffer for this. Let us get it cleared up—be done with it and start again on a new leaf. Who helped you, Petal?'

Mr. Potter dropped these last words out casually—as though he were only mildly interested to know the answer, as though Petal was now on the side of the law.

Mr. Edwards knocked out his pipe on the edge of his heel—clack-clack-clack—then sucked through it, making a noise like a

horse breathing heavily. For a moment Petal's one contracting eye looked at the heavy masculine figure in the corner, then returned to its expressionless watching of Mr. Potter. And all the time the clock softly reiterated that delay was futile.

Mr. Potter was allowing the silence to do what it had done before. He was in no hurry; he was, as Mr. Edwards noticed, quite content.

'Put it this way,' he said. 'You may as well tell me because even if you don't I shall find out. It will all come to the same thing in the end. Was it Philips?'

Mr. Edwards cleared his throat in a rough belligerent way and looked at the carpet with great distaste.

'Come here, Petal,' said Mr. Potter. 'Nearer. Now we have got six more weeks of this term. You don't want to stay under a bit of cloud, young man, do you? Well, then, let's get all this cleared up.'

Potter would have gone on had it not suddenly become clear that Petal was about to speak. One eye followed relatively by its companion moved from the face of Mr. Potter to that of a great sunflower in the garden, and his lips, faintly smoked with ink, parted to form quietly and stubbornly the word 'God.'

There was a boy called Todd who was Captain of the School and of the Rugby Fifteen. He was soon to leave, having secured the first scholarship to Winchester.

'Impossible,' snorted Mr. Potter. 'Todd! Now look here—if you think—'

'No, sir—please, God.'

'Who?'

'God.'

There was an enormous silence. The sort of silence that belongs to deserts and heavens on hot summer nights, the silence of great distance and great emptiness—it came largely from Mr. Potter's great emptiness in the face of Petal's claim for great distance; into it the joy of Mr. Edwards soared like a great bomber.

A long look at Petal's face prevented Potter from saying 'This is no time for joking.' Petal couldn't joke. The fact was deplored in all his reports every term. So Potter turned to the window but he knew that on this occasion the gesture represented a loss not a gain in power. It was a retreat, pure and simple. And then after a bit he said something which is only worth putting down to show that he did speak. 'Go upstairs'—he managed to colour his voice with a sort of medical concern. 'Go upstairs,' he said, 'and tell Matron I sent you to her. You're to stay in bed to-day.'

Yes, he spoke, but the story got about and it became a legend how Petal had had the last word. Poor Petal. When he bravely knelt to say his prayers on the dormitory linoleum, a whisper became customary. 'Hush, Petal's cribbing.' He became no better loved—because he became no cleaner, no more stalwart, no less selfish : he went on keeping to himself, his things to himself, his locked case and his thoughts and his secret determinations, and as to the long divisions answered in a single line—well—to this day nobody knows.

Ruskin: Love and Economics

BY PETER QUENNELL

HAD RUSKIN been by temperament more cynical or more sensual, the problems that beset his middle years might have been resolved, or thrust aside, very much more easily. Had his outlook been narrower and his disposition colder, he might have taken refuge, like many of his contemporaries, in a stern unbending puritanism. But, although by training he was a puritan, he could never reconcile himself to that deliberate limitation of sensibility which a puritan creed demands from the lover of art and nature. His eyes were among his greatest assets; and, the most seeing of men, he could never learn to close them. How often did the harvest of sight prove to be full of strange and dangerous treasure-trove! For, alas, though ugliness was always wicked, wickedness (or what he would have preferred to consider such) was by no means always ugly. Nor was virtue (or what he wished to esteem as virtue) invariably attractive. Thus, one day, at Turin, sitting in a Protestant chapel, listening to a very dull and ill-conducted service, he had been horrified by the contrast between the 'little squeaking idiot' who occupied the pulpit, presiding over a congregation which consisted of 'seventeen old women and three louts,' and the majestic Venetian artist, Paolo Veronese, whose radiant *Queen of Sheba* he had spent the previous day examining. He loved its humanity; he adored its sensuous warmth:

Paolo's as full of mischief as an egg is full of meat' [he had written to Norton in November 1858]—always up to some dodge or other—just like Tintoretto. In his Solomon receiving the Queen of Sheba, one of the golden lions of the Throne is put into full light, and a falconer underneath holds a white falcon, as white as snow, just under the lion, so as to carry Solomon on the lion and eagle . . . ; the Queen's fainting, but her dog isn't—a little King Charles spaniel, about seven inches high—thinks it shocking his mistress should faint, stands in front of her on all his four legs apart, snarling at Solomon . . . ; Solomon all but drops his sceptre, stooping forward eagerly to get the Queen helped up—such a beautiful fellow, all crisped golden short hair over his head and the fine Arabian arched brow—and I believe

after all you'll find the subtlest and grandest *expression* going is hidden under the gold and purple of those vagabonds of Venetians.

Must he try to convince himself, then, that 'this mighty Paul Veronese, in whose soul there is a strength as of the snowy mountains, and within whose brain all the pomp and majesty of humanity floats in a marshalled glory . . . this man whose finger is as fire and whose eye is like the morning,' was condemned to perdition as a 'servant of the devil'; whereas the 'poor little wretch in a tidy black tie . . . expounding Nothing with a twang,' to whom he had listened so impatiently, was a member of the Elect and a servant of Almighty God? By comparison with Titian and Veronese, the earlier Italians, 'Francia and Angelico, and all the purists, however beautiful,' were but 'poor, weak creatures. I don't understand it; one would have thought purity gave strength, but it doesn't.' He would go further: the greatest artists were all of them 'boldly Animal': 'to be a first-rate painter—you mustn't be pious; but rather a little wicked, and entirely a man of the world.' And again: 'A good, stout, self-commanding, magnificent Animality is the make for poets and artists'—a conclusion which he would sometimes contradict, but which remained nevertheless one of the opposing 'fan-shaped strata' built into the volcanic substance of his critical Mont Blanc.¹ Meanwhile, it was clear that, much as he might respect the robust animality of the great Venetian painters, this was a quality that, in the management of his own existence, he could not hope to emulate. He was unsure of his own direction, doubtful of his aptitudes. Pleasure might call to him, but Duty nagged at him. There were moments when he dreamed of retiring 'to Paris or Venice and breaking away from all modern society and opinion,' of cultivating himself alone and seeing what would come of it; but from these dreams he was invariably recalled by a recollection of the thousand-and-one tasks that urgently required him. He wished to destroy as well as create; for, beside gathering 'all the Titians, Tintorets, Paul Veroneses, Turners, and Sir Joshuas in the world into one great fireproof Gothic gallery of marble and serpentine,' drawing 'all the subjects of Turner's 19,000 sketches in Switzerland and Italy,' and, in the sphere of immediate social reform, getting 'everybody a dinner who hasn't got one,' he would have liked to 'macadamise some new roads to Heaven with broken fools'-heads' and 'hang up some knaves out of the way . . . I think it would be wholesome for them, and for other people, and . . . they would make good crows' meat.' Yes, he must fight. But where should the battle begin? He had not yet made up his mind

¹ See Ruskin: *The Middle Years*. CORNHILL, No. 974, page 94.

(he complained to Norton in August 1859) what he ought to fight for—‘whether, for instance, people ought to live in Swiss cottages and sit on three-legged or one-legged stools; whether people ought to dress well or ill; whether ladies ought to tie their hair in beautiful knots; whether Commerce or Business of any kind be an invention of the Devil . . .; whether Art is a crime or only an Absurdity; whether clergymen ought to be multiplied, or exterminated with arsenic, like rats; whether in general we are getting on, and if so where we are going to. . .’

In which direction was he bound himself? Months slipped by; a new decade had opened; he seemed as far as ever from alighting on a satisfactory answer. He persevered in his work—not because he overestimated its value: ‘my work’ (he told the Brownings) ‘does no one much good’; but because the mechanism of his incessant activity was ‘becoming too strong for any hope of resistance, and what of worth can be done must be done by accepting that spirit (or that spring, I had better have said), and out of wheels and spindles bringing what whirring results one can, till they have had their day. . .’ So let them revolve! Meanwhile, to accelerate the process, there was a growing conviction that, unless he made haste, all that he prized in the world would be ruined and obliterated. With the return of interest in Gothic architecture, ignorant and impious hands were being laid upon the cathedrals of Europe. The ‘restorers’ were at work, scraping, rebuilding and demolishing. During September 1858, Ruskin had wandered forth among the fountains of the Place de la Concorde—‘beautiful beyond description in the golden twilight’—having satisfied himself that the fabric of Notre Dame was now a total loss; and reports continued to arrive of further depredations. The catastrophe, he felt, showed a malicious sense of timing; for it was just as he had persuaded his readers ‘to look a little at thirteenth-century Gothic,’ that the hordes of the vandals had swooped down and ‘every cathedral of importance’ had been destroyed by restoration. The same fate was overtaking the pleasant towns of Switzerland: every place that he had once loved was to-day a railway-station or a rubbish heap. . . .

So vexed and perplexed was the mood in which Ruskin set foot upon the slope that leads rapidly downhill from forty towards old age. Meanwhile, between 1858 and 1860, two events had occurred—events at first sight of disproportionate significance: he had encountered a little girl, to whom her mother had begged that he would teach the rudiments of drawing, and he had produced and published a forthright attack directed against the

entire system of modern economics. Each event was to introduce a momentous chain of happenings, and each corresponded to one of the main aspects of Ruskin's personal character. The lover had been long in abeyance. Since the failure of his love for Effie, there is no record that he had experienced any private passion. Perhaps his senses were troubled, but his heart remained unmoved. Then, in 1858, some months before his period of 'unconversion,' the weakening of his early Evangelical faith, which he himself dated from the holiday he spent in Turin, where the Protestant pastor had been compared unfavourably with Paolo Veronese, and he had gazed on the half-naked limbs of the swart Italian beggar-child, a new excitement began to enter his life, an intense emotional preoccupation, destined, as time went on, to master his feelings more and more completely. Rose la Touche was only nine years old, when she and her forty-year-old admirer came for the first time face to face. Their encounter was strangely fortuitous. Ruskin always enjoyed praising the work of gifted *amateurs*—in one generation his protégée was Miss Elizabeth Siddal, in another Miss Kate Greenaway—and among those upon whom he lavished encouragement during the late 'fifties, besides Thomas Dixon, an ambitious cork-cutter who wrote to him from Sunderland, were the future Lady Ashburton, Lady Canning and her sister, Lady Waterford. Of both sisters he had a high opinion. Lady Canning's floral sketches, so he informed her mother, were 'the grandest representations of flowers he had ever seen'; while, to describe Lady Waterford's 'Charity Girl,' he borrowed from Pre-Raphaelite terminology and declared that she was 'stunning!' Among Lady Waterford's friends was a certain Mrs. La Touche, the wife of a rich Irish banker, former Master of the Kildare Hounds, who had recently found the light and had been converted and re-baptised by that fire-breathing evangelist, the Reverend C. H. Spurgeon. Their home was at Harristown, Kildare; but Mrs. La Touche, an intelligent and cultivated woman, often came to London; and it was during one of these periodical visits that she enlisted Ruskin's sympathy, explaining that she was anxious that her three children—two girls and a boy—should begin their education in art under Mr. Ruskin's guidance. Would he visit them? Ruskin agreed, and presently appeared in Mrs. La Touche's drawing-room 'somewhere near Green Street.' His hostess pleased him; 'extremely pretty still,' she was all that he had expected, 'but a good deal more than I expected, and in all sorts of ways.' She was vivacious, impressionable and seemed eager to learn. Plainly, her visitor may have assumed, another Lady

Waterford! Her main anxiety, however, was for the education of her children; and in her younger daughter, Rose (as had already been suggested by her introductory letter), Mr. Ruskin would perhaps distinguish a talent worth developing. Emily was out of the house. But might not Rose be summoned? Ruskin assented. Soon 'the drawing-room door opened, and Rosie came in, quietly taking stock of me with her blue eyes as she walked across the room; gave me her hand, as a good dog gives its paw, and then stood a little back.' Thus, poised on the verge of an unpredictable gulf, the child in her nursery frock, the middle-aged man with his rusty whiskers, thin and stooping but alert, in the formal clothes to which he always contrived to impart an air of expensive informality, hesitated for an instant while they exchanged observant glances. 'I thought you *so* ugly,' Rosie told him afterwards. 'She didn't quite mean that,' he hastened to add; but, her mother having spoken to her again and again of 'the great Mr. Ruskin,' she had looked forward to meeting the facsimile of one of Garibaldi's portraits or a replica of Theseus among the Elgin Marbles; and their visitor was sufficiently prosaic—enough like any other middle-aged gentleman whom she had encountered in her mother's company—to strike her at the initial glance as extremely disappointing.

Very different was Ruskin's immediate response. More than thirty years later, in 1889, when every detail of that first meeting was still distinct within his memory—preserved with jealous care, just as a letter that Rosie had sent him, encased between thin gold plates, was hoarded in his breast-pocket—he committed his earliest impressions to the pages of *Praeterita*. Nothing had vanished—neither her way of standing, which was 'a little stiff,' nor the shape of her mouth, the 'lips perfectly lovely in profile;—a little too wide, and hard in edge, seen in front.' She was of middle height, her eyes 'rather deep blue at that time, and fuller and softer than afterwards.' The rest of the features were 'what a fair well-bred Irish girl's usually are; the hair, perhaps, more graceful in short curls round the forehead, and softer than one sees often, in close-bound tresses above the neck.' The ensuing colloquy is unrecorded; but Ruskin tells us that he promised to teach the children and, since he could not undertake to come every other day so far afield as Mayfair, proposed that his two pupils, suitably escorted, should drive out to him at Denmark Hill. Thither they came one sunny day. During which month seems a trifle obscure; for there is a letter addressed by Mrs. La Touche to Ruskin dated February 1858, mentioning the pleasure that

both she and Rose had derived from this original visit ; whereas Ruskin believed that his introduction to the La Touches took place very much later during that 'eventful year,' soon after his return to England, when, we must assume, he was already 'unconverted.' He remembered it at least as rich in autumn splendour. The orchard boughs were laden with apples, and peaches glowed behind their netting on 'the old red garden wall.' Together he and the children explored the farm. Rose's sister, Emily, proved to be 'a perfectly sweet, serene, delicately chiselled marble nymph of fourteen, softly dark-eyed, rightly tender and graceful in all she did and said.' She excelled in arranging with an exquisite sense of style everything her fingers touched ; and, if she lifted a handful of flowers, 'they fell out of her hand in wreathed jewellery of colour and form, as if they had been sown, and had blossomed, to live together so, and not otherwise. Her mother had the same gift, but in its more witty, thoughtful and scientific range. . . . ' The whole family, indeed, appeared to be not only charming and talented, but eminently suggestible. Their first lesson 'lost itself . . . in pomiferous talk, with rustic interludes in the stables and pigsty' ; but before long the little girls, encouraged by their master, had settled down to serious business, examining Turner's sketches of mountain-scenery, learning to draw the 'convolvuluses, hollyhocks, plums, peaches, and apples' that he brought in from the garden, absorbing geometrical principles and making bold expeditions into 'the pretty mysteries of trigonometry.'

He adored them both ; and he liked their mother ; but for Rose, as it soon became apparent, the affection that he felt was of a very special quality. The Fates were weaving 'another net of Love.' Just how quickly he became aware of his entanglement we cannot determine with any hope of precision from the records that he left behind. But if his subjugation was not immediate—or if he did not himself immediately recognise that admiration and affection were merging into infatuation—there is no doubt that his feelings had begun to crystallise during the first few days or weeks. Even more nympholeptic than his previous passions, Ruskin's passion for Rose La Touche partook of several different characters. There are some amorists—Ruskin was one of them—to whom youth makes an appeal far stronger and more dangerous than any adult beauty : on whom the childish body and the childish face, with their suggestions of innocence and inexperience, so strangely shot through by gleams of dawning knowledge, exert an infinitely deeper fascination than the most finely developed

of finished human masterpieces. Adèle and Charlotte had been young: Rose La Touche was younger still, while Ruskin himself was proportionately older and, in his attitude towards adult women, more deeply disillusioned. Rose was a child and, for many years to come, could make no demands on his imperfect or intermittent manhood. Yet his love was passionate as well as pure; for to assume that Ruskin was by temperament cold, or fundamentally lacking in the ordinary human instincts, is at once to misunderstand the nature of his genius and to omit an important clue to the origins of the catastrophe that later overwhelmed him. In his own view he was Rose's lover; but for the time being, of course, was content to remain an adoring friend and master. Love took refuge in an elaborate—an almost too elaborate, too delicately studied—playfulness. Together they inhabited a dream-world of fancies, myths and nicknames. Rose was 'Rosie-Posie,' her governess 'Bun': her sister they named 'Wisie,' after a dog that Ruskin had loved and lost, 'a white Spitz, exactly like Carpaccio's dog in the picture of St. Jerome.' Mrs. La Touche was 'Lacerta' because she had the wisdom and grace of a serpent, without its guile or venom. As for the Master, he was 'St. Crumpet,' perhaps in reference to his 'ugliness,' though the saintly title is said to have denoted that he was always kind to beggars.

Rose herself, the centre of his cult, the midmost flower of his *hortus conclusus*, that haven of the inner life to which, since his boyhood, he had so often fled for refuge, had, even at the age of nine or ten, not a few of the mysterious attributes we associate with a cult-object. She had nothing of Elizabeth Siddal's romantic nullity; nor was she a perfectly commonplace, well-balanced female-in-miniature of the type of Adèle Domecq. It is obvious that she was an exceedingly clever girl. She had a quick brain and, as Ruskin presently discovered, a strong religious tendency. Emotional and responsive to love, she included, nevertheless, in her constitution a certain touch of latent hardness. This aspect of her being was reflected by features that, although singularly attractive, were apparently a trifle sharp-edged; when she was nine years old, Ruskin noted that her lips, seen from the front, were somewhat hard in outline; and, during his later existence, he admitted that her chiselled beauty had been 'too severe to be entirely delightful to all people.' That she was uncommonly old for her years is demonstrated by a letter which Ruskin preserved to the end of his life and with fond indiscretion printed in *Praeterita*. Addressed to 'Dearest St. Crumpet,' it shows both an unusual command of language and an altogether precocious grasp of her correspondent's

feelings. It is a consoling, yet a cajoling, missive. Rose was abroad at the time—some months after their first meeting Mr. and Mrs. La Touche had decided to pass the spring in Italy—and Rose, who (her adorer remarked with gratitude) was ‘really a little sorry to go away, and . . . understood in the most curious way how sorry *I* was,’ writes to describe her sensations on crossing the Channel, her opinion of the pictures in the Louvre and her introduction to the South of France. She assures Ruskin that she constantly thinks of him and, with her family, discusses him. Much play is made of his nicknames—‘St. Crumpet’ and a secondary name, ‘Archegosaurus,’ ‘meant partly to indicate my scientific knowledge of Depths and Ages . . .’; and, besides informing him that, during her stay in Paris, she had dutifully admired the Veroneses and the Titians, but had admired the statues almost as much—‘It is wrong, St. Crumpet, to like that noble Venus Victrix as well as Titian? If it is, am I a hardened little tinner?’—she abounds in admonitions and mildly feline *badinage*. He is not to be ‘Kingfishery’—that is to say, not to sit on a bough in sulky kingfisher-fashion—but to write ‘packets—trunks’ for the whole family’s amusement. Of her own central position she seems fully aware, and, dramatising herself as the Rose, she writes to tell him ‘how my cousins the moorland roses nodded at me as I passed and how they couldn’t understand why Irish hedge roses bloomed in July instead of March.’ Yet, beneath the femininity, appears, now and then, an odd and touching sensitiveness. Ruskin’s lessons had borne abundant fruit. She, too, had been illuminated by the strange Ruskinian fervour and, even at this stage, when she had not yet reached the brink of adolescence, was learning to discourse in the Master’s tone, and to respond to the beauties of a landscape with something of his promptitude. Rose holds the pen, but through her mouth, though remotely and in muted accents, Ruskin’s voice is speaking:

It was so pleasant to be running after the sun to the south (Don’t be Kingfishery) and awaking at about 5 in the morning to see long plains of greyheaded silvery olives and here and there pink perky peach trees dancing among them—And there were groups of dark cool cypress trees pointing upwards, and hills and grey rocks sloping to the sea—the Mediterranean. So we shook off our sleepiness . . . and saw behind those peaks of craggy hills a pink smile coming in the sky . . . so we watched and suddenly there rose . . . such a sun—‘nor dim, nor red’ (you know the verse) and then dipped back again below the hills.

A word of sympathy concludes the letter. It is clear that Rose

had already begun to carry the burden of Ruskin's private confidences; for she starts her last page by wishing 'so very much' that her disconsolate friend were happy. 'God can make you so,' she reminds him confidently, thus striking a note that, growing by slow degrees louder and more ominous, was, after the passage of more than ten years, to sound their friendship's death-knell.

She returned from Italy, and the relation was resumed. He could not see her as often as he wished; but the idea of Rose, and of the relief and satisfaction she seemed to offer, floated constantly before him. Meanwhile he had finished *Modern Painters*—a task that, together with the other tasks he had recently completed, and the pressure of the troubled feelings under which he had been labouring, reduced him almost to exhaustion. He went abroad, travelling alone; though he was still devoted to his parents, for some time he had begun to fret more and more uneasily against parental government. He no longer shared his mother's religious faith, or could only accept it with many reservations; and simultaneously he felt an increasing distrust of the beliefs, moral and economic, on which old Mr. Ruskin's peace of mind was founded. He had revolted tentatively in 1852, writing a series of letters to *The Times*, which he had first submitted to Denmark Hill and which his father had refused to forward. Now at Chamouni during the summer months of 1860, he produced *Unto This Last*, of which three instalments were published that summer and autumn in a new popular monthly magazine edited by Thackeray. The CORNHILL had been launched at the beginning of the year and, from the opening number, which sold one hundred and twenty thousand copies, had proved extraordinarily successful. Its appeal was wide: in the course of six months it printed contributions by Trollope and Thackeray (each of whom provided a serial novel), by Charlotte and Emily Brontë, by Thomas Hood, Washington Irving and Richard Monckton Milnes. Millais was a frequent illustrator; and the February issue had been distinguished by the original apparition of that exquisite and disturbing poem, Alfred Tennyson's *Tithonus*. The prosperous Victorian reading-public, at once seized upon the CORNHILL; and here was the readership at which Ruskin aimed, for *Unto This Last* was primarily an appeal to the conscience of the wealthier, more thoughtful and more influential classes, to a stratum of the English world whose wealth, luxury and sense of security during the years that separated them from the Year of Revolutions had registered a steady increase. British opulence was the wonder of the Conti-

ment; and the issue of the CORNHILL that included Ruskin's third instalment also found room for an essay on *Luxury* which, beginning with the assertion that 'there was never, probably, in any age or country, a larger mass of comfortable, respectable people, than is now to be found in these islands,' concluded by suggesting that 'the atmosphere in which the comfortable classes of modern English society live, is most unfavourable to intellectual and moral stature, and that changes in it are the indispensable condition of growth. Its most unwholesome ingredient is the intense self-satisfaction by which it is pervaded.' That spirit of self-satisfaction, coupled with an 'exaggerated appetite for solid advantages' on which the anonymous essayist elsewhere gravely commented in the pages of *Unto This Last*, became Ruskin's chiefest target.

Thus the man who at other moments announced that he was tired of trying to do good, and that he contemplated retiring into æsthetic seclusion, there to cultivate his own gifts and endeavour to enjoy his life, in 1860 apparently reversed his decision and took up yet another crusade. 'Just one more howl . . .' he had written to the Brownings. But there was less of the howl, less of an aggrieved and girding tone, in this new attack on the public conscience than in any previous prophecy. It is measured, closely condensed, elaborately thought out. It is at the same time extremely personal; for Ruskin's personal situation can never be dissociated from the opinions that he put forward, and he was as inescapably himself as in the rôle of art-critic. The state of society excited his anger, not only because social conditions were theoretically unsound, but because they exacerbated his sense of sin and, as a lover of beauty and a sensitive human being, it seemed utterly intolerable that he should be called upon to contemplate them. Every drive from Denmark Hill northwards into London took him through regions of slowly darkening squalor, and there was worse—far worse—to be observed in other London districts. Since his boyhood the metropolis he knew had undergone gigantic changes. It had developed beyond all expectation. Between 1800 and 1830 the inhabitants of Greater London had increased from 865,000 to 1,500,000; and by the 'fifties another million laborious citizens had by some means found a home there. How they were lodged, and how they obtained a livelihood, were problems that the most energetic reformer might well despair of solving; but Henry Mayhew, whose *London Labour and the London Poor* (a much more curious work than Frederick Engels' earlier enquiry into the condition of the English working-classes) was first published in 1851 and revised and re-issued on several occasions

up to 1865, had made a strenuous effort; and his three massive original volumes contain an extraordinarily dramatic picture of the world's largest, richest city, where the prosperous quarters floated like small trim islands upon a vast surrounding ocean—an ocean of poverty, with depths below depths, in which the off-scourings of one class provided, literally as well as figuratively, a hope of subsistence for the class immediately beneath it.

'Mud-larks,' 'pure-finders' and 'toshers,'¹ scavengers and street-sweepers, peddlars and costermongers, all added to the complexity of the fantastic London landscape; of these a considerable number existed close to the starvation-level; and the conditions in which they were housed were uniformly wretched. Though attacks had been launched on some of London's more pestilential slum quarters, many 'rookeries' still existed—dilapidated clusters of ancient filth-encrusted houses, which enclosed population of unknown extent, and looked down on to a courtyard containing a pump, a rubbish-heap and a single common privy. Stumbling up a flight of broken stairs, Mayhew would find himself in a room 'about nine feet square' which 'furnished a home for three women,' one of whom, a girl, 'eighteen years old last twelfth-cake day,' had just been confined and lay on a mattress, on the floor, beneath a patchwork counterpane. The room was thick with the smoke which poured from the chimney: 'the place was filled with it, curling in the light, and making everything so indistinct that I could with difficulty see the white mugs ranged in the corner-cupboard . . . the ceiling slanted like that of a garret, and was the colour of old leather, excepting a few rough white patches, where the tenants had rudely mended it. . . . Light was easily seen through the laths, and in one corner a large patch of the paper looped down from the wall. . . . They had made a carpet out of three or four old mats. They were "obligated to it for fear of dropping anything through the boards into the donkey stable in the parlour underneath. But we only pay ninepence a week rent," said the old woman, "and mustn't grumble."'

This interior is only one of many—not a few of them far more squalid—into which Mayhew, a Virgil of the industrial underworld, conducts the sympathetic reader. And then, besides his visits to the 'respectable' poor and his expeditions along the banks of the Thames, where he observed the 'mud-larks,' young

¹ 'Mudlarks' lived by scavenging in the mud of the Thames foreshore: 'pure-finders' by collecting the droppings of dogs which they sold by the pail to the tanneries: 'toshers' by exploring the London sewer-system for useful or valuable objects that had slipped down house- and street-drains—a dangerous occupation which called for skill and courage.

children or old men and women, groping in the inky river-mud for bones, lumps of coal, scraps of iron and other precious refuse, Mayhew found his way to the music halls and tap-rooms, saw the wild gaiety of a 'penny-hop' and watched the 'toshers,' temporarily rich after a successful foray, spending the spoil of the sewers in some 'low' and friendly public house. But whether 'respectable' or criminal, abject as the 'mud-larks' and 'pure-finders' or relatively prosperous as the 'toshers' and the costermongers, the entire London proletariat, according to Mayhew's examination, was alike in one respect: it had neither traditions nor organisation, neither present security nor any hope of betterment: accumulated by chance and necessity, as the demand for cheap labour drew more and more of the population away from the country into the fast expanding capital, it scraped a precarious livelihood by every means open to it, a miscellaneous, amorphous mass, with no roots in the past or claims upon the future. Philanthropy could merely brush its surface. Its plight (so many Victorian critics candidly considered) was a sad but inevitable result of the rate of modern progress.

Into this theory entered much serious conviction, united, now and then, perhaps, with a certain touch of cynicism. The opponents of Lord Shaftesbury's Factory Acts included not only conservative employers but thoughtful economists, firmly persuaded that any attempt to regulate the supply of labour—for example, by prohibiting the employment of very young children or shortening the hours they worked—would so dislocate the structure of commercial society as to provoke evils far more pernicious than the wrongs it sought to combat. *Laissez-faire* was still the predominant doctrine; the views of the Manchester School were still embraced with fervour by such well-intentioned and well-endowed businessmen as Mr. James Ruskin, who believed in a set of economic laws almost as rigid as those laws, moral and physical, which a benevolent Creator had invented to roll along the universe. Against this belief his son was rebelling. During his weeks of seclusion at Chamouni, he took society to task for all the anguish and perplexity that it heaped upon his conscience—for what it allowed him to see in the London streets and for what it obliged him to read when, cultivated, secure and free, he opened in his foreign hotel an English daily paper. Incidentally he was taking his father to task, both for the evils he deplored but countenanced, and for the state of privileged subjection in which the dotting old man had obliged his only son to grow up. *Unto This Last* was a blow for humanity: it was also a blow for spiritual

independence struck by Ruskin on his own behalf. He wished to emancipate mankind at large from their dull degrading bondage: himself he yearned to escape from a very different form of servitude which, if it had not degraded, had certainly crippled and enfeebled him.

The opening instalment of *Unto This Last*,¹ sub-titled *The Roots of Honour*, appeared in the August CORNHILL, between Trollope's *Framley Parsonage* and the second of Thackeray's essays on *The Four Georges*, one being an elaborate and affectionate picture of the Victorian social background, the other a glimpse of the bad old times, which modern morality and modern progress had long since superseded. Both were works of comfortable entertainment; but there was nothing comfortable in the enthusiasm with which the author of *Unto This Last* rushed straight upon his subject: 'Among the delusions (he began) which at different periods have possessed themselves of the mind of large masses of the human race, perhaps the most curious—certainly the least creditable—is the modern *soi-disant* science of political economy, based on the idea that an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of the influence of social affection.' There, at once, is the gist of his argument. Social relations cannot be determined by precepts of expediency: the relationship of employed and employee is a relationship between man and man, and unless 'social affection'—the respect that we owe to our fellow human beings—is considered in the contract, society must become a ruthlessly destructive and, at length, a self-destructive organism. Men, he pleads, cannot be regarded as mere economic units bound by inexorable laws of supply and demand, which authorised the progressive employer to demand as much labour as he could exact at as low a price as he could pay for it, thereby obtaining 'the greatest benefit to the community, and through the community, by reversion, to the servant himself.' This might be a praiseworthy means of procedure, if the man employed 'were an engine of which the motive power were steam, magnetism, gravitation, or any other agent of calculable force. But he being, on the contrary, an engine whose motive power is a Soul, the force of this very peculiar agent, as an unknown quantity, enters into all the political economist's equations, without his knowledge, and falsifies every one of their results. The largest quantity of work will not be done by this curious engine for pay, or under pressure, or by help of any kind of fuel which may be supplied by the chaldron. It will be done only when the motive force, that is to say, the

¹ 'I will give unto this last, even as unto thee'—Matt. XX. 14.

will or spirit of the creature, is brought to its greatest strength by its own proper fuel ; namely, by the affections.'

Many of the keenest spiritual torments that afflicted the Victorian epoch were caused, it would now appear, by an unceasing effort to persuade Christian morality and commercial expediency to run in double-harness. The remedies which the Victorians applied were strenuously philanthropic : the system itself must remain unaltered, but its uglier manifestations need not go uncared-for ; and a hundred-and-one benevolent institutions were set on foot to deal with them. Ruskin did not disdain, and himself practised, philanthropy, but he could not believe that, until the system itself had been revolutionized, these superficial remedies were of any lasting value. 'Never [he had already written in *The Stones of Venice*] had the upper classes so much sympathy with the lower, or charity for them, as they have at this day, and yet never were they so much hated by them ; for, of old, the separation between the noble and the poor was merely a wall built by law ; now it is a veritable difference in level of standing, a precipice between upper and lower grounds in the field of humanity, and there is pestilential air at the bottom of it.' That had passed ; after all, the writer was an art-critic ; and there were, in his book, many superbly decorative, finely eloquent disquisitions to which the nervous reader could resort for intellectual refuge. In his latest essay there were few or none ; persistently, relentlessly, even arrogantly, he proceeded with his argument, demanding whether it were true (as the political economists asserted) that wages could never be regulated except by the demand for labour : whether it were right that civilisation, so called, should oblige vast masses of mankind to support themselves by work in which they could not reasonably be expected to feel the smallest pride or interest : finally whether the whole structure of contemporary commerce were not at the same time both inequitable and wasteful. His concrete suggestions might, no doubt, be brushed aside. It was more difficult to dismiss his destructive criticism, or the appeal that he made to established Christian ethics. Having insisted that the employer should not only deal fairly with and respect, but learn to love, his workmen, he went on to urge that, for a while at least, until others could share in it, the more prosperous classes should curtail their private luxury. Not that he deprecated luxury for its own sake : 'Luxury is indeed possible in the future—innocent and exquisite ; luxury for all, and by the help of all ; but luxury at present can only be enjoyed by the ignorant ; the cruellest man living could not sit at his feast, unless he sat blindfolded.' Even more disturbing

than this appeal to compassion—a virtue on which, not without good excuse, the Victorian upper-classes felt that they could pride themselves—was his vision of the planned state, in which freedom of individual enterprise would be, to some extent at least, restricted: ‘I hold it for indisputable, (he observed) that the first duty of a State is to see that every child born therein shall be well housed, clothed, fed and educated, till it attain years of discretion. But in order to effect this the Government must have an authority over the people of which we now do not so much as dream.’¹

When the Labour Movement at length became an important force in England, enquiry among its leaders and members established the fact that *Unto This Last* had had a wider and deeper influence upon their way of thinking than any other volume. Yet Ruskin was not an orthodox Socialist. Unlike William Morris, whom he loved and respected, but with whose life his character and career present at so many points an extremely striking contrast, he refused to yoke his inspiration to any single movement, but continued, in his whimsical and capricious fashion, as it were to dangle his allegiance before several different parties. ‘Of course I am a Socialist (he wrote)—of the most stern sort—but I am also a Tory of the sternest sort.’ At one moment he was ‘a Communist of the old school’: at another, a staunch Imperialist. But to this breadth of view there was an important limitation—at no time could he concede that he might ever be a Liberal. ‘I am a violent Illiberal,’ he informed the world; for, although many of the opinions he put forward had been developed in deliberate defiance of the opinions held at Denmark Hill, his parents’ household still provided the type of the ideal government he wished to impose upon society—paternal, authoritarian, in which men had learned to rule and learned to submit to their rulers with equal grace and good sense. But the touch of Toryism in Ruskin’s socialism could not conceal the essential subversiveness of the measures he was advocating; and, while James Ruskin professed himself deeply pained and, with the emphatic syllable ‘*Bosh!*’, Rossetti slammed the door of his ivory tower behind him, British journalists were loud in condemnation, stigmatising the CORNHILL essays as ‘eruptions of windy hysterics’ and ‘utter imbecility.’ The world, announced a reviewer, did not intend to allow itself to be ‘preached to death by a mad governess.’ Particularly repulsive was ‘the way in which Mr. Ruskin writes of

¹ Ruskin, on the other hand, believed that ‘all effectual advancement towards . . . true felicity of the human race must be by individual, not public effort.’

the relations of the rich and poor.' It was worse than repulsive : it was actually seditious, an incitement to revolutionary hot-heads to destroy the very fabric of civilised existence. There was a grave danger, the critics apprehended, that his 'wild words' would 'touch the springs of action in some hearts, and ere we are aware a moral floodgate may fly open and drown us all.'

So vehement were the protests it aroused that Thackeray, yielding apparently to the pressure exerted by his publisher, agreed to discontinue *Unto This Last* and declined to print the fifth instalment. Ruskin was hurt and angry : he was yet more dismayed when his essays, in book form, failed to find an audience, and he learned that they had had an adverse effect upon the popularity of his other books. This began the 'period of reprobation' ; and the disappointed prophet signalled his fall from public esteem by several sweeping gestures. He did not break with his parents—that would have demanded a degree of courage and unkindness quite beyond his personal scope ; but he made it clear, once and for all, that his father and his father's beliefs had no longer any hold on him. Not an illusion was permitted to survive : neither his own nor his parents' feelings were spared in the singularly ruthless scrutiny to which, during the years that followed, he submitted their relationship. He informed his mother and father, categorically and dispassionately, that he was convinced that they had ruined him. Their early discipline he by no means resented ; for 'men ought to be severely disciplined and exercised in the sternest way of life . . . but they should never have their hearts broken'—a catastrophe that he now attributed to the various errors of his upbringing, 'the two terrific mistakes which you and Mamma involuntarily fell into . . . You fed me effeminately and luxuriously . . . but you thwarted me in all the earnest fire and passion of life. About Turner you indeed never knew how much you thwarted me—for I thought my duty to be thwarted. . . . If I had had courage and knowledge enough to insist on having my own way resolutely, you would now have had me in happy health, loving you twice as much (for, depend upon it, love taking much of its own way, a fair share, is in generous people all the brighter for it), and full of energy for the future—and of power of self-denial.' As it was, his 'power of duty' had been exhausted in vain and he was obliged 'for life's sake' to resort to self-indulgence 'just when a man ought to be knit for the duties of middle life by the good success of his youthful life. No life (he concluded) ought to have *phantoms* to lay' ; and the phantoms that appeared to surround him were numerous and

terrible. Only by work could he hope to appease them; and, since the failure of the prophetic essays, work, though he did not desist from it, was a method of consolation that very often failed him.

These complaints were not limited by the complainant to the immediate circle of his family. He confided also in such friends as Lady Trevelyan and Charles Eliot Norton, expatiating at length on the infinite harm that parental love had done him. ' . . . I know my father is ill, [he wrote to Lady Trevelyan from Milan during July 1862] but I cannot stay at home just now, or I should fall indubitably ill myself. . . . If he loved me less, and believed in me more, we should get on; but his whole life is bound up in me, and yet he thinks me a fool. . . . This form of affection galls me like hot iron, and I am in a subdued fury whenever I am at home, which drives all the marrow out of every bone in me.' To Norton, he spoke of the 'unendurable solitude' that encompassed him at Denmark Hill; and, more and more aroused in his own defence, and more and more embittered against the blind, uncomprehending love to which he attributed all his woes and failures, he proceeded to detect its traces in the attitude towards him of that exceedingly unsentimental person, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. 'I am grateful for your love [he remarked]—but yet I do not want love. I have had boundless love from many people during my life. And in more than one case that love has been my greatest calamity—I have boundlessly *suffered* from it. But the thing, in any helpful degree, I have never been able to get, except from two women . . . and from Edward Jones, is "understanding." I am nearly sick of being loved—as of being hated—for my lovers understand me as little as my haters.'

There is, indeed, about Ruskin's letters to his parents and friends written at this period, a tone that can only be described as one of anguished petulance. The petulance is unmistakable, but so is the anguish. Suddenly cut off from the springs of religious faith, condemned 'to live without hope of another world' when he had been 'accustomed to it for forty years,' having at last declared war against the system of paternal authority in which his youth was moulded, he became as wilfully rebellious as he had previously appeared submissive, and announced that only by respecting his independence could those who professed to love him ever hope to save him. . . . 'The *only* thing you can do for me (he explained to James Ruskin) is to let me follow out my own work in my own way and in peace. All interference torments me and makes me quite as ill as any amount of work. . . .'

And to Rossetti, in a letter, already quoted, which administered the final shock to their slowly weakening friendship: ' . . . I am at present out of health and irritable, and entirely resolved to make myself as comfortable as I can, and therefore to associate only with people who in *some degree* think of me as I think of myself. I *may* be wrong in saying I am this or that, but at present I can only live or speak with people who agree with me that I *am* this or that.' As if to emphasise his spiritual isolation, Ruskin again left England during the summer of 1861, and for the next two years made his headquarters abroad, either in Switzerland or in Italy. He wrote to his mother and father at frequent intervals, and, when he returned to England, never failed to see them. But the old bondage had been finally cast off. He was at length a free man—and none the less unhappy.

James Smetham

BY GEOFFREY GRIGSON

I

THE subjects of Pre-Raphaelite pictures, Sickert once said, 'sometimes suggest themselves as they might be seen by a sniggering acolyte.' And about many of their pictures, their 'good' pictures, their allegory-stuffed essays in painted morality or painted religion, there is a curious frivolity and awkwardness; a small conception is watered down with moral good form into a large banality. It is not that the painters of the fifties and the sixties, many of them, lacked deep feeling, and deep anxieties, but that in a mid-century way, they were not honest. The difference in art between nineteenth-century France and nineteenth-century England was not altogether that the English were weak in talent; they were weak in that honest intellectual logic which leads to the inescapable conclusion, weak in life. 'What!' said Degas, 'I buy a carriage! Would you have an artist ride in a coach and four?' But the London artists, having been social inferiors for so long, wanted a carriage. And a butler. Let us be artists, let us aim high, let us indulge the virtues and the charitable urges, but let us also be gentlemen at last, be Church of England, and confuse Christianity and domesticity. Let us not be raffish; but let us teach in the Working Men's College, invite selected working men for the week-end into our country houses; and if there is a touch of phosphorus lighting our souls, let it not appear too frowardly in our canvases. Let us be true to the details of nature, paint ivy-leaves well; but let us bowdlerise life. Let Art be Fine; under Christian Socialism.

James Smetham was a painter not indeed uninfected by some of this *malaise*, but courageously selfless, courageously determined to live and to paint; and so after a life which ended in madness, he serves the sentence of being still unknown. He flits, in a faint way, in and out of Pre-Raphaelite memoirs and letters. He was a queer fish on the edge of respectable or fashionable waters—not quite perhaps a Gentleman Painter. For one thing he was obstinately, deeply religious. He was a Methodist—decidedly; and the days were gone when an artist, as forty years

before, could be of any kind of enthusiastic denomination—could be obviously a Baptist, a Plymouth Brother, a Swedenborgian, an Irvingite. He had 'more the air of a clergyman than a painter.'¹ He was 'galvanically alarmed' when Rossetti read him his poem on a London prostitute; in Watts-Dunton's *Aylwin* he is made a figure almost of fun, the preaching, mystical artist, Wilderspin.

"Then you are a spiritualist?"

"I am an Aylwinian, the opposite (need I say?) of a Darwinian."

"Of the school of Blake, perhaps?" I asked.

"Of the school of Blake? No. He was on the right road but he was a writer of verses. . . ."

"I am my own school; the school of the spirit world."

"Pre-Raphaelites?" said Wilderspin. "The Master rhymes, madam, and Burne-Jones actually reads the rhymes. However they are on the right track in art, though neither has the slightest intercourse with the spirit world, not the slightest."

Because, as we shall see, the figure of fun despised the scramble for fame, the compromises it demanded, the social cadging, the making of connections, because his soul, even against his will, was indeed lit with phosphorus, because he held, with Degas, that painting was not a sport, because he had no private means to free him from struggle, Smetham was in turn despised, was an oddity, and a worldly failure. But it should be said first that there were those who knew his worth and gave him a full admiration. Ruskin was one. Ford Madox Brown (no popular artist in his own time) was another:

I think your colour is exceedingly fine, [Brown wrote to him], and that for poetry of conception you are perhaps second to no artist in the country, so that along with the progress you are constantly making I cannot but believe you are on the eve of some great success. I hope this may be so, but at any rate I feel certain that like Blake, Crome, and others, you will leave behind you works that will be of real value to your country and the world.²

The ever generous and warm Rossetti was a third: 'Owing to your plans of life, you have remained as yet much more in the background than could possibly have been the case had your work been more widely seen. . . . Your work is the result of mental as well as of artistic gifts and must prove permanent.'³

How just was this praise by Rossetti and Madox Brown? What was Smetham as a painter?

¹ *The Digressions of Elihu Vedder*, 1911.

² MS. letter.

³ *Letters of James Smetham*, 2nd edition, 1902, p. 31.

II

The earliest painting by Smetham I have seen is a self-portrait of 1844 (lately presented to the Ashmolean). It is a small oil, half filled with a large, loose-haired face, rising from an open neck. Large eyes, a generous mouth, a face at once sensual and firm, and expressive of the title he gave the painting, 'Thoughts too deep for Tears.' To us the title may seem trite; but Smetham was 23, the words were new, and Smetham was possessed by Tennyson's *Poems*. He had bought them in the second edition of 1843—the year in which he had come to London intending to enter the Academy schools. 'The days of my youth,' he wrote afterwards of these poems by Tennyson, 'are enfolded in their scent, as the scent of violets hidden in the green.'¹ The portrait indeed was painted when the natural, unwarped man in Smetham was dominant, when for a while he was unbent with 'all that unutterable sense of sin, that terrible deadly fight with evil,' which lowered him eventually into madness. He said of himself, 'My mental habits, my tastes, everything, would have led me away from the Puritans'—'I believe if I could have been doubtful I should have been.'² Smetham's primal nature was rich in the way of Tennyson's. He wrote to his wife in 1855:

I had a grand walk. White mists lay on the fields on either side; trees, dark, still drooping, hung round the silent meadows, out of which came a close rich odour of new mown hay. The sky was full of that after sunset green-silver glow with deep blue above, and immense fragments of storm cloud in wild shapes floated low down in the sky, through which the new rising moon in one direction opened numerous and delicate rifts and bars of dappled light, and *over* which hung the stars few and white. Solitude, stillness and the presence of these grand images, which all seem to embosom more truth and emotion than man can fathom, raised me into a more exalted mood than usual—the *romantic* mood; which I take to be based on the presentiment of the immortal mood.

But much, alas, had been injected into his sense of the romantic, into the full tide of his enthusiasm.

Smetham's father was a Methodist minister, for the time being at Pateley Bridge, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, when Smetham was born on the ninth of September, 1821. In 1832 or 1833, when he was eleven, he went—*dies fatalis*—to Woodhouse Grove School. There, with the sons of other ministers, he lived through

¹ *Letters*, p. 154.

² *Letters*, pp. 234-5.

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JAMES SMETHAM: SELF-PORTRAIT. 1844.

(Ashmolean Museum)



JAMES SMETHAM: THE DEATH OF EARL SIWARD. 1862.

(Private Collection)

the morbid eccentricities of Methodist education in the early nineteenth century ; and there, beyond doubt, the virus of madness was injected into a nature ready to receive it. A terrible school, which had been dominated by a terrible man, The Rev. Samuel Ebenezer Parker. Boys were most damaged, not so much by getting too little food and too much thrashing, not so much by confinement within the walls, or by the silence enforced on them at meals and in their bedrooms, or by the crudeness of their life, as by the religious excesses visited upon them within this barbarity. Parker thrashed and was sarcastic, would paste 'lodgings to let unfurnished' on a stupid boy's forehead. But he 'gloried in a revival.' By the time Smetham arrived at the school, Parker (who developed religious mania) had probably left ; but the terrors did not dwindle under his successor, who came after the boys had rebelled in 1832. In the next winter a minister came to the school with a band of prayer leaders. He preached on the salvation of Noah by faith, on 'the terrible final severance of parents and sons which must be the result of a neglect of so great salvation.' Penitent boys sobbed and cried out heart-rendingly, the minister leaving the pulpit 'to point the individual mourners to Christ.' The next day the boys sang and prayed, they went to the Quarterly Love Feast the day after, and on the night of the fourth day 'the sacred flame burst out in the dormitories' and nearly every boy 'professed to have found peace with God.' Another revival four years later intermingled with the death of one of the boys. The rest of the school tip-toed past his bed as he lay dying ; they wailed at his death, and carried him to the grave singing a dirge. Well-nigh 'every boy seemed to be a weeping suppliant at the mercy-seat, seeking the one preparation for death.'¹

How this schooling affected James Smetham (he was one of the many boys who ran away), his maturity makes plain, haunted as it was by that unutterable sense of sin. His life see-sawed between melancholy and enthusiasm, between happiness and crisis, between the purity and sickness of romance.

Not much is recorded of Smetham's next three years, during which he was bound to the architect E. J. Willson, at Lincoln. Willson was a Roman Catholic, a Gothic revivalist and a friend of the elder Pugin, a cultivated man with cultivated friends. One of these was Peter De Wint. He encouraged Smetham in his wish to be a painter, and persuaded Willson to let him go. Not that Willson's opposition had been unkind ; sympathetically, and as a compromise between architecture and painting, he had allowed

¹ Dr. Benjamin Gregory's *Autobiographical Recollections*.

Smetham to spend a year drawing all the figures around Lincoln Cathedral. It was a year which worked in Smetham much as the early experience of drawing in Westminster Abbey had worked within Blake. And here for a moment Smetham himself opens one small window onto his inner life. Discussing Heathcliff and *Wuthering Heights* in relation to himself in a letter of 1856, he dismissed Heathcliff, in an unconvinced way, as a feeble and impalpable nightmare: 'I put him beside the man who followed me in a dream with a loaded horse-pistol, among the rafters of Lincoln Cathedral, holding a dark lantern.'¹

After leaving Willson he went through hellish experiences of mind as a young painter between 1841 and 1847, saying afterwards that one of his 'most formidable enemies was a vivid and ill-trained imagination.'—'Against inward and outward evils of this kind there existed a very powerful love of truth and purity, and great approval of and delight in the law of God. The antagonism of these two forces between the ages of twenty and twenty-six went nigh to threaten my reason.'²

The first crisis broke in 1847, before his father's death:

There was enough in my early life to lead me to dread that God's mercy was clean gone for ever. I never tried to *make* peace. It came at my father's deathbed, so to speak from his hand, and from his voiceless lip and from his seraphic eyes. Just before that, at Lincoln, where I had *deliberately made up my mind not to come and see him die* (as I painted alone in the Assembly Room there), a strange agony which ground out groans and wrung out tears and compelled me to sob aloud as I paced the long room, had suddenly descended on me like a deadly cloud. It had one door of escape—'Go home'—and it fled suddenly when I said silently 'I will.' Before this I had neither righteousness nor peace. I had had desire.³

III

At this time of crisis in his twenties one must still picture Smetham as he had appeared in the self-portrait—with an attractive 'stamp of an intellectual beauty,' his hair chestnut, 'in a sort of reckless profusion tending to the leonine,' his face 'harmonious and proportionate,' the lips 'ample inclining to fullness.' He was gentle, a brilliant talker between intervals of moody silence; and he looked at the world out of eyes 'feminine to softness,' but 'wide and earnest.' The 'undulating' or 'wavering' way in which he walked, and the way he moved his hands, made it seem as if

¹ *Letters*, p. 77.

² *Letters*, p. 17.

³ MS. letter.

he were 'feeling or groping towards the Unknown in the endeavour to seize something not wholly out of reach, but still eluding the grasp.'¹

Of the early work of this period I have seen little. Smetham painted portraits for a living, professionally as a photographer now takes photographs (and was then very soon to take them). He painted landscapes and perhaps other pictures for himself; he painted in the Midlands and in the North, and in 1851 he came back to London as a drawing master. In 1854 he married, and his family began to grow. By now he had reached a courageous and independent certainty of how his life was to be used: 'I want not fame, but life; the soul's calm sunshine; Life in the eye of God' (1853).² It was the soul's calm sunshine that Constable had wanted before him. Smetham was poor, but he was a deliberate orderer of his life as a man and as a painter who refused to play the social game of the English artist as the nineteenth century knew it; and as we know it to-day; but there was a pressure of darkness around the always desired and the intermittently obtained sunshine, which threatened to return, and which returned indeed. There are hints again and again in Smetham's letters of his insecure possession of the calm light. He records that his mind was filling with 'painting material—out of the abundance of the heart—I want to fill myself till I boil over . . . a man ought to stuff himself so full in all directions as to do all without labour. The reason why men *invent* with labour is because they go to cut the wood down while the house is a-building'—and then he broods over Wordsworth's lines about Chatterton and gladness and madness, broods over Haydon—'I have been standing at a melancholy height above a horrible whirlpool and watched the gasping of a drowning man—and heard his yells, and have recollected my old thoughts'—a brooding in which he comforted himself by rejecting Haydon's 'fearful ambition and vanity and obstinacy,' and his hatred, rather than scorn of the world, and by restating his resolution 'not to approach Art from the side of Ambition—but to live in it by dogged and humble labour' (1853).³ He gets encouragement from Ruskin (leaving in one letter a delightful and penetrating description of the Ruskin household). He works: 'Four or five days ago I was painting with a painful delight some buds and flowers of geranium—some buttercups with their leaves and I had a restless pleasure in imitating the mingled grey and yellow green of the leaves and the hoariness of the hairy buds'; yet knows 'by past

¹ William Davies's memoir, in *Letters*, pp. 34-5.

² MS. letter.

³ *Letters*, p. 54.

experience that I have a *genius* for misery.'¹ He re-reads *Wuthering Heights* and devours everything else he has not read by the Brontës, his comments showing his fascination and a kinship he admits and wishes to vanquish:

The grass blade that fulfils its *law* and occupies its place seems noble to me—and man—especially that man myself—seems evil and foul and contemptible. . . . *Wuthering Heights* is all you describe it to be—I know too well what vehement passions are to doubt the truth of it on the whole—but do you know I try to train my mind off the burning and the grand. I will not have my soul lit with phosphorus any more than I can help (December 1st, 1855).²

He gives 'inwardly a full unrestrained tribute of sympathy and admiration'³ to *Wuthering Heights*, but perceives 'that the real, eternal, the true, the abiding, does not lie in these grandeurs and swelling emotions, and entrancing passions in any measure' (January 8, 1856),⁴ in which he would have gloried, he writes, when he was twenty.

But the phosphorous was not so easily quenched. Ruskin was influencing his practice, warning him against 'the strain of the intellect over anything,' telling him he was thinking and conceiving too much, that 'I want more realism—that I am conventionalistic—that I seek for curves and shrink from the stern truths of form.'⁵ The third volume of *Modern Painters* was leading him to 'finish,' or 'added fact,' 'to the great principle, *study nature*'; so he finished his picture of *Naboth's Vineyard* 'tolerably well but in the Pre Raph. style—quite a new picture for me' (April 22, 1856).⁶ Impressed a year later by Ford Madox Brown's *Last of England* which he saw at Windus's house, he writes that he had been 'sneaking round the preserve of Modernism with my rifle these two years and yet have never yet been ably to raise a bird.' But he was convinced that modernism

is the way of power and true grandeur—we have not half the business with the past that we have with the present. . . . However, in respect to those studies which have been the staple and lever of my life—This, namely—that whereas till within the last six months I have been making the past as far as I have been concerned with it, alive, and never mean to abandon the past—*during* the last six months I have begun as earnestly to study and record the present and evoke as much as I can out of life in the midst of which I live. . . . I draw with increasing detail. I

¹ MS. letter.

² MS. letter.

³ MS. letter.

⁴ *Letters*, p. 77.

⁵ MS. letter.

⁶ MS. letter and *Letters*, p. 80.

drew the newspaper boy who died yesterday who spit blood in the stormy weather as he brought the newspaper a fortnight ago.

He felt that this new modernism took him more out of himself, and would help to 'root out that foolish "subjectiveness" which however valuable for a time is not the thing for a life.'¹

This was put down on April 18th, 1857. Increasing development, increasing conviction, increasing resolution; yet also increasing darkness and foreboding, an increasing tension until in that year, Smetham collapsed. He has given details of his mental agony, his self-accusation, his damaged self-esteem. 'From 1844 to 1857 I think I seldom found myself in the company of a good man without a sense that I was unworthy to be in his society.' He morbidly distrusted his own belief in God, and could not believe in being pardoned:

I was always upbraiding myself. In August . . . this feeling began to be morbid, and at length it deepened into a hurricane which lasted for months, but which I will not attempt to describe. It seemed as if hell were let loose upon me—and in the dark! A man in a small boat alone, amid the foam and wind and thunder of the Atlantic, would be a faint image of my sensations.²

He was tired out, he did not sleep, he was in perpetual nervous excitement. By the end of September he gave up work, and was fixed in depression. His wife, an excellent, understanding and sympathetic woman, tried everything to lighten his mind. She took him to be photographed—since photography was novel—and they were taken together, hand in hand, a man absent and a woman too sadly present. She took him north to his mother and sisters: 'he became worse—would see no one—speak to no one—do nothing—but take long solitary walks generally after dusk.'³ Then he turned:

In March, 1858, on one well-remembered moonlight night, while my sister and I were standing by the window of my mother's little parlour looking into her small garden, this inward storm ceased. It was as when a man struggling among mist and lightning finds himself suddenly in pure summer air, softer, sweeter, and serener than he has ever breathed before; in the silence of the grand plateau—alone with the sunshine and with God!⁴

In August he came back to London, recovered, back to his wife and children, his studio and his work. His peace endured.

¹ MS. letter.

² W. G. Beardmore, *James Smetham, Painter, Poet and Essayist*, pp. 17, 18.

³ MS.

⁴ Beardmore, *op. cit.*, 17-18.

Though 'it is true I sometimes feel within me,' he said, 'the remains of sin,' he was more easily able to find comfort and protection and strength in his religion.

IV

For eighteen years or so, Smetham's boat now rode evenly. He began to work again with an immense refreshment. In October, after his return, he declared :

I look back with love and wonder and pleasure and thankfulness at the long sand lane (with occasional mire) into which for the sake I am sure of good and right and pure motives and better results in the end I diverged some 12 years ago and in which I sacrificed almost every outward palpable present form of comfort and success—(strange that just as I emerged from it I should be called to suffer !). But I am all *through* it to the last curve. I have *done* at least *one* thing which I intended. Like Prospero I have broken my wand and buried my books as far as the pursuit of secret, removed, unexplicable plans is concerned. Henceforth I belong solely to the outward. It is mine if spared, to *do*, to *put out*, to *give*—no longer specially to receive.

He was 'steadily clearing out into finish every unfinished picture'; and mentions ten pictures as now being complete.¹ Smetham's production in the next years, before his final collapse—his paintings, and his series of etchings—if it did not establish him quite with himself, did not give him public standing and recognition as an artist, if it did not keep him out of straits very often, did at least bring him some steady patronage, as well as the admiration and respect of other artists—in particular of Rossetti, of Ford Madox Brown, and of Frederic Shields (whose interior life was scarcely less peculiar and tortured—though less illuminated—than his own). He was saturated, like Constable, in the Englishness of his own painting. Thus, in 1860, to a friend who was going to Italy: 'nothing but a sense of duty will ever drive me to Rome and Venice. My difficulty is to appreciate our little back garden—our copper beech, our weeping ash (a labyrinth of dropping lines in winter, a waving green tent for my babies in summer), our little nailed-up roses and twisting yellow creepers . . .'² He gave himself to admiration (limited in its understanding) for Blake, to admiration, among others, for Turner (though he found him inhuman), for Stothard, for Francis Danby, for Constable, for Samuel Palmer and for Gerard Dou.³

¹ MS. letter.

² *Letters*, p. 87.

³ See his essays on Blake and Dou in *The Literary Works of James Smetham*, 1893.

His own painting was blended of the more calmly romantic and as much as he required of the new modernism: it stood upon his conviction that 'if Art is to be really good there must not only be the basis of poetry but the basis of true representation.'¹ He kept to his determination not to play the social and ambitious game; in spite of the sensible criticism of Rossetti. Rossetti was not himself an exhibiting artist, but he was successfully ambitious, and made his thousands in a year. He wrote to Smetham in 1865, 'I am afraid you will think no better of me for pronouncing the commonplace verdict that what you lack is simply ambition'—but he explained ambition—'i.e. the feeling of pure rage and self-hatred when anyone else does better than you do. This in an ambitious mind leads not to envy in the least, but to self-scrutiny on all sides, and that to something if anything can.' And Rossetti finished in a sentence critical to life and to Smetham's life: 'You comfort yourself with other things, whereas art must be its own comforter or else comfortless,'²—to which it might be replied on Smetham's behalf that he was one of those, like Blake on a major scale, to whom life was finally of more moment than art. Yet some of the soft shortcomings in Smetham's painting, and some of the soft perversities and blindnesses in his acutely percipient letters and his criticism do spring beyond doubt from those 'other things' with which he comforted himself; and also from the fact that, among religious climates and practices, the climate and practice of Methodism lack fineness, lack the final crystalline lines of spirituality. Smetham, one feels, knew that perfectly well, but was not to be tempted out of his loyalty. His paintings, his poems, his letters lack the wiry whip, the wiry incandescence of the writings of the Catholic Hopkins, or the finality of the best in that Catholic among Pre-Raphaelites, Coventry Patmore. Methodism is, or was, romanticism in religion, romanticism close to sickness and death; deep and hellish as Smetham's experiences had been, he wanted, so to speak, more of that Drydenism to which Hopkins felt himself to be tending.

Watts-Dunton's Wilderspin is a caricature, but one can understand it. One can understand it with Smetham, the Methodist class leader and the artist, Smetham unworldly among the worldly, Smetham leaving the dining-room table in disgust at Swinburne's language, Smetham refusing to compromise, even in want, Smetham writing, 'One man's board and lodging does not need a nation to know of his wants. Half a dozen good friends will serve a man for life, and the good solid knocks at the plug by

¹ *Letters*, p. 199.

² *Letters*, p. 162.

my three friends, Rossetti, Brown, and Shields, turned the frozen tap, and that was enough.' ¹

Even, as I believe, if Smetham's cast of religion hindered the strictest realisation of his powers upon canvas, even within the circumstances that he rated living above art, still he was remarkably unblinkered, remarkably catholic in his tastes and judgements. He had his own opinion about what he named Rossetti's 'Italianism,' but declared also :

Rossetti has done me more artistic good than all other art influences put together. I have not the least wish to adopt his style or his ideas, nor have I indeed much personal relish for them. To expend as much soul on the phases of thought he often pursues would seem frightful waste to me. God's works—his men and women—his trees and clouds and skies—his operations by day and by night—painted so as to give pleasure to ordinary folk, seem to me more worthy. I have no very large faith in the great importance of Art as a moral agent. Ornaments, caskets, jewels, round tyres like the moon, queer romantic appointments and a general bewitchment with curley-cues I can't care for a bit. There is nothing in it for me. There is something in great Nature, even in a donkey at twilight munching a thistle.

Yet, he went on, 'from his own point of view, D.G.R. is a long way the strongest man as a painter I ever knew, so clear-headed and practical, so simple and grand, so free from littleness and affectation.' ²

Still, it is both Smetham's strength and weakness that one could never have found him in that evening which George Boyce described at Swinburne's rooms when Rossetti and Swinburne 'were looking over *Justine* by the Marquis de Sade, recent acquisition of the latter'; ³ it is both his strength and his weakness that, knowing the soil out of which grows the monumental in art, he pushed one part of his nature aside. He lived through it as a man ; but not as an artist. He made a personal triumph ; he endured, but even as a man he denied ; he denied the worst when he should have looked it in the face ; he falsely analysed his own fate ; and his fate, his worst, still hid around the corner, watching him and waiting for him. By 1876, he was in danger once more, depressed, drawing himself in the margins of his bible dejectedly beneath the shadowed mountains of sadness, against

¹ F. M. Hueffer, *Ford Madox Brown*, 1896.

² MS. letter.

³ Extracts from Boyce's diary, in the Old Water Colour Society's *Annual Volume*, 1941.

verse 12 of the seventy-first psalm: 'O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help.'¹

Sleeplessness, excitement, darkness came on him again in 1877 when he returned from the Scottish islands, where he had been after 'everything striking which promises some day to rise into what I think a solemn or sweet distance; or to give a rock for Sir Bedivere to clank his iron heel upon,' *not* after 'Ben Much Whisky from the foot of Ben More Whisky,' on a board 2 feet 6 inches long which 'Mr. Briggs will buy . . . because that was where he shot the monarch of the glen, and felt as if his foot was on his native heath.'²

He was fifty-six or nearly. The unutterable sense of sin was at him again, the latent injections of Woodhouse Grove were producing their final, triumphant paralysis. He never recovered. William Michael Rossetti summed the matter—though not quite accurately:

Pondering his narrow fortunes, Bible in hand, and brooding over the frequent Old Testament promises that Jehovah would amply provide for the worldly well-being of the devout, he came to the conclusion that he must too truly be a reprobate, exposed to the divine displeasure in this world and the next. He totally broke down under this strain upon his mind and feelings.³

He lived in a death of 'gloomy though peaceful and painless inaction'⁴ until, twelve years later, at sixty-seven, he died—on February 5, 1889—and was buried in Highgate Cemetery. He had come near to being a great man.

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But a great artist? Perhaps it is unsatisfactory to end by admitting that too many of his pictures are still too scattered to be sure of his stature. He cannot be estimated by the few works which the Ashmolean has lately acquired; or by the etchings and the two other pieces—slight both of them—which are in the Tate Gallery. One is a good drawing, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the other his small painting *Naboth's Vineyard* of 1856, which has depth, delicacy and excellence of colour, though it betrays some of that conventionalism of which Ruskin accused him and which at that time he was trying to correct. There are several paintings which one knows of by description or by reproduction—the picture of a dragon in a fen, which belonged to Watts-Dunton and was

¹ Beardmore, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

² W. M. Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, 1906.

³ *Letters*, p. 384.

⁴ *Letters*, p. 385.

much admired by Rossetti, the remarkable *Enchanted Princess* or *Sleeping Beauty* of 1859, in which the stiff figure of a girl lies across the picture on a red couch before an arcade of flame-green which pierces deeply to the background; or that painting of *The Dream of Pilate's Wife* (1871) which the American artist Elihu Vedder saw in his studio. Night—'a blood-red counterpane seemed like a sea of blood creeping up towards her breasts, threatening to overwhelm her as she lay under the spell of some nightmare.'¹ A painting perhaps which derived more than most from his nature undivided. One needs to know all of them.

Yet as a draughtsman, at his best, Smetham was nervous and strong, his line, as he described the real line in drawing, 'a set of rapid syllogisms reasoned in cypher.'² His drawing was sharpened by his habit, from 1848 to his death, of 'squaring' his books—his bible especially, in small marginal drawings which appear to me often intense and evocative—and of squaring his way through his diary, recording by line and visual memory rather than by words; and in his painting line and colour and depth could condense and come together in admirably inevitable designs, as in the small oil of *The Lobster Pot Mender* (1864), in which one may see the outcome of his modernism which followed upon knowledge of Ruskin and his work and the painting of 'several pictures in the severely imitation style.'³

Of his subject pictures such as *The Death of Earl Siward* (1862), harmoniously rich in colour and implicated in design, though awkwardly and at a glaring point weakly drawn, too few are accessible to know the range of their accomplishment and power; it is among these that there are perhaps surprising discoveries to be made. And not only among subject pictures, but among his works, as Frederick Shields called it, of 'passionate landscape.'⁴

To many of his letters Smetham gives a rare light by nineteenth-century 'word-painting,' particularly when he realises moments by the sea under an illuminated and clouded sky. One may compare with these word-paintings, in their melancholy and sense of the immortal, his watercolour of two figures by the sea—*Shore Scene, Bognor*, now in the Ashmolean—which is suggestive of the aims of Kaspar David Friedrich. Dominantly blue and silver, a complete tone of feeling unites the painting; one feels before it, as the two figures look out to sea and as the white ripples curve toward them and toward one's eye, how it is much more than the rendering of a momentary impulse, how it condenses Smetham's

¹ *Digressions of Elihu Vedder*, 1911.

² *Letters*, p. 196.

³ MS. letter.

⁴ MS. letter.

long meditation, his sense of the endless and the elusive, the excellent and the eternal. So far as one can judge, Smetham's distinction in his time was to be blindfolded neither by fashion nor by dogma. He avoided the pointless mystery, the mystery which is only mysterious; he avoided the morality, the allegorical canvas which needs for its interpretation a gloss outside of the frame. He avoided the hot and challenging 'accuracy' of colour, and the unpictorial assemblage of 'accurate' detail, however much he gained from Ruskin and the 'imitation style.' Seeing sketches by Turner in 1858, they confirmed 'what I have long believed to be true, that in preparing for painting the best way is not to paint finished things from Nature, but to make slight, often symbolic records, in abundance of *facts*.'¹ Haunted in 1870 by landscapes of Rembrandt, he found that Rembrandt's 'gravest reason, fitting imagination, and most deep fireside love and affection' were the ingredients of a sublime and homely melancholy which was no trick of the painter's, but 'humanity working out its own image in its own way, and with its own materials':

The pre-Raffaelite dicta of ten years ago would have laid these landscapes dead. The 'awe of observation' peeping and botanising and protesting, and putting the screw on square inches, would slay all such art, and it is the grandest of all. And the only answer to all mere verbal logic of imitation is a Flanders hurricane of disgust whistling over the wolds.²

Smetham in English art of the mid-nineteenth century has distinction, peculiarity, and sanity. There is much of good in his poems, as of excellence in his letters—his sense of the immortal:

While the huge moon rises,
And the large white planets
Wheel and glow above thee,
Till the cottage tapers,
Swallowed by the darkness,
Leave no human symbol
Underneath the sky.

—his desire to know

The full-orbed mysteries of the sky
Which here in glittering fragments lie
And all our baby wondering try

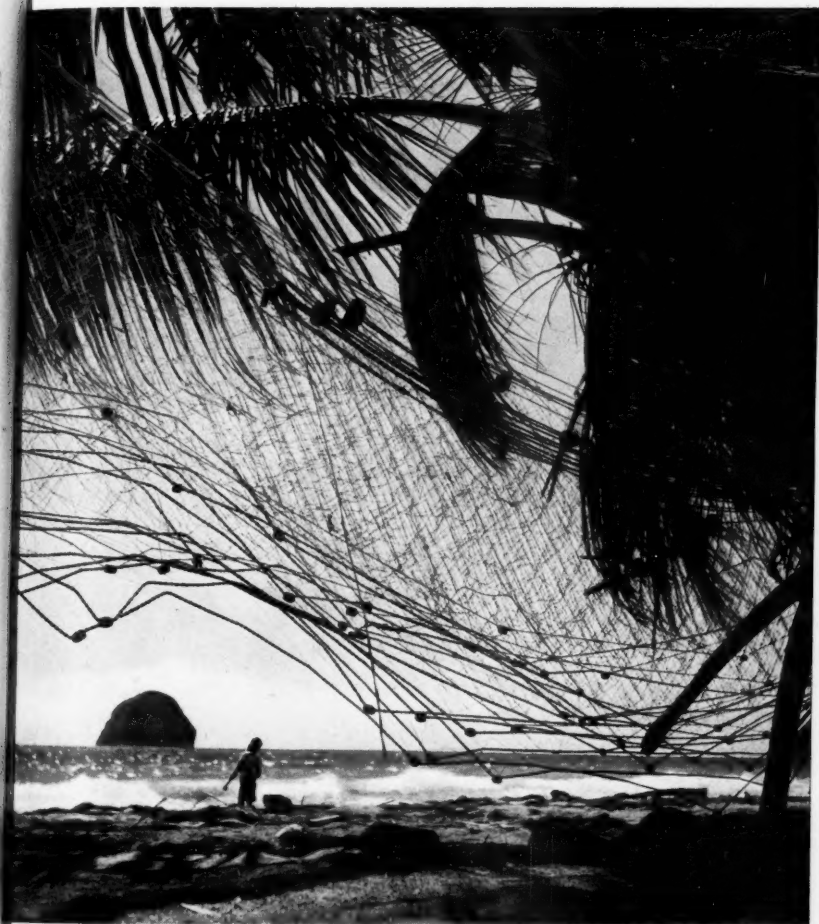
While now with glee, and now with dread,
In small experiment we tread
Among the living and the dead

¹ *Letters*, p. 82.

² *Letters*, pp. 236-7.

There will be much more to be experienced, one may hazard, in his best paintings, in his primary works, when they come at last into the galleries from his descendants and from the oblivion of private ownership. Until then one must guard against opinions based on the occasional sight of works which are mediocre or worse. I hope to see much more by Smetham; but I have seen enough to believe with Rossetti that his best indeed belongs to the best in the English art of his time; to believe in its permanence.

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SEASCAPE, MARTINIQUE. DIAMOND ROCK IN THE BACKGROUND.
DURING THE NAPOLEONIC WARS THIS ISLET WAS COMMISSIONED
AS H.M.S. 'DIAMOND ROCK' AND USED AS A BASE FOR RAIDS ON
FRENCH COMMERCE.

Photographs of the Caribbean

by A. Costa



MOUNT PELÉE, MARTINIQUE, WHICH IN 1904 DESTROYED THE
CITY OF ST. PIERRE, KILLING 40,000 INHABITANTS.



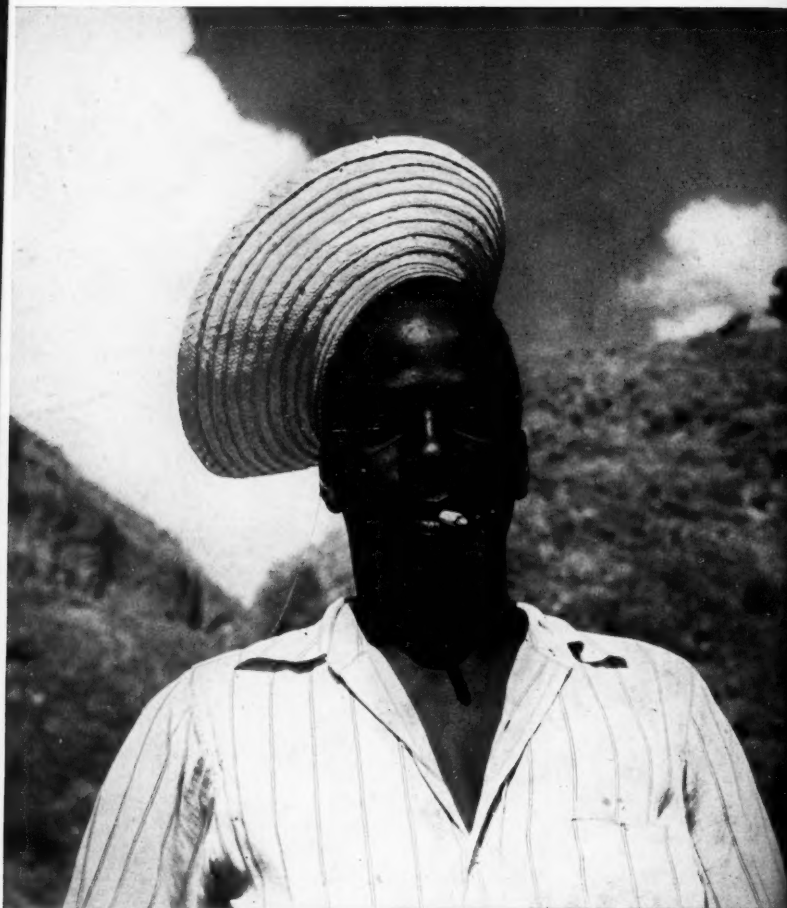
GADELOUPE, FRENCH WEST INDIES. THIS PHOTOGRAPH WAS TAKEN FROM THE SUMMIT OF THE SOUFFRIÈRE VOLCANO WHICH, UNLIKE MOST WEST-INDIAN MOUNTAINS, IS BARE OF FOREST BUT COVERED WITH SPONGY YELLOW-GREEN VEGETATION.



18TH-CENTURY CEMETERY IN ST. KITTS, THE OLDEST BRITISH
POSSESSION IN THE WEST INDIES. THE TOMBS ARE A RELIC OF
PAST PROSPERITY.



LAGOON IN THE ISLAND OF GRENADA, BRITISH WEST INDIES.
GRENADA, WITH ITS 18TH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE, IS PROBABLY
THE MOST ROMANTIC OF ALL WEST-INDIAN ISLANDS.



INHABITANT OF SABA, DUTCH WEST INDIES. SABA IS A VOLCANIC ISLAND, AND ITS CAPITAL, BUILT IN THE CRATER, BEARS THE NAME OF BOTTOM. THIS FASHION OF WEARING THE HAT IS A TRIBUTE TO PREVAILING HIGH WINDS.

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